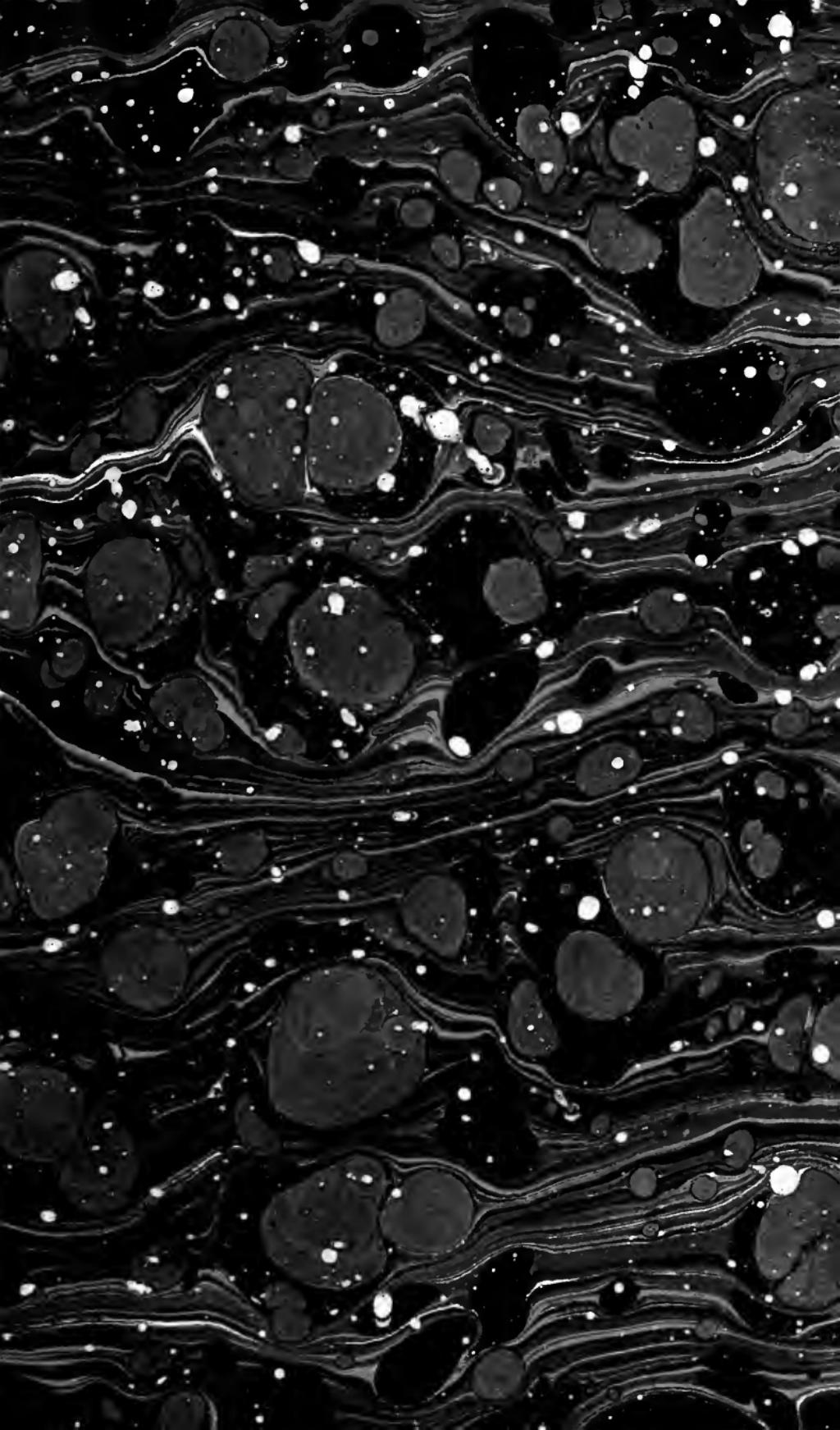




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OUR OLD TOWN.

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OUR OLD TOWN.

BY

THOMAS MILLER.



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INTRODUCTION.

I HAVE attempted to write this work, respected reader, just as I should have talked to thee, had we been intimate friends, and thou hadst asked me to tell thee all I knew about OUR OLD TOWN:—the only difference being this, hadst thou taken down all I had said in short hand, I should have gone as carefully over every word afterwards, as I have now done, before intrusting the matter to the press.

With but few exceptions, what is here written I have beheld with mine own eyes, or heard with mine own ears, for the traditions that make up the oral history of OUR OLD TOWN, have been handed down from generation to generation through years that are now hoary; and they still live, though the names of those who first heard them, when they were but work-a-day gossip, have long since been forgotten.

But most of all have I depended upon the little pictures, that, almost unaware, photographed them-

selves on my ‘inward eye,’ and which I could call up, and look at, at any hour, as they ever hung in the picture-gallery of the mind—that gallery in which Memory so much loves to exercise herself.

I have, kind reader, brought OUR OLD TOWN before thee, as it was in my younger years, before its sleepy old river had ever been disturbed by the splash of a steamer’s paddle, or the silence of its green solitudes broken by the startling scream of a railway-whistle. It was *then* stamped with the impress of a past century, which modern improvements have *now* nearly obliterated.

THOMAS MILLER.

Rose Cottage,
London, 1857.

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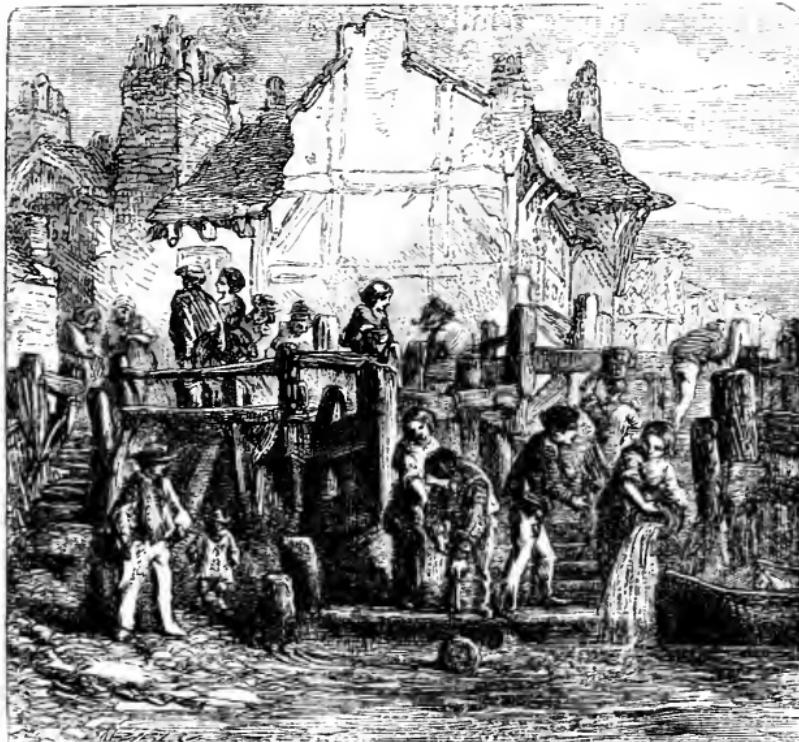
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Our Old Town.



CHAPTER I.

OUR OLD TOWN is a strange, rambling, twisting, dreamy-looking place: portions of it are very ancient, and the principal streets are built in the form of a cross—a sure sign of great antiquity. A beautiful navigable river flows beside it, and runs for

miles through a rich pastoral country, then empties itself into an arm of the sea. Behind, it is hemmed in by green breezy hills, looking as if, undated centuries ago, its first inhabitants had erected their huts at the foot of the hills for shelter, while they pastured their flocks in the valley. Beyond the town, along the river banks, the black bulrush still nods beside the wild water-flag, while the tufted plover goes wailing over the hedgeless marshes, giving to the landscape, in many places, the same primitive features it wore when the river was mastless—before the blue smoke that pointed out the dwelling of man had curled above the overhanging foliage. Within, Our Old Town is filled with gates and yards, courts and alleys, hollow-sounding archways and windowless ‘twitchells,’ lanes and passages, and staithes that go bending in and out, like a maze. Without, all around it, lie little fields, which are called holts, holms, garths, glebes, cars, crofts, closes, ings, paddocks, and other such old-fashioned names as are now only found in ancient deeds and charters. It is mentioned as a burgh in the earliest Saxon records, and bore the same name then that it bears now. As there is not another market within

several miles of Our Old Town, its principal visitors are the inhabitants of the neighbouring villages, who supply the place with their rural produce, and take back in return such articles as do not abound in the hamlets ; and so the exchange goes on as it has done for centuries—the living generation dealing at the same shops which their forefathers used in years that have departed. Ships of heavy tonnage ever come and go, laden with valuable cargoes, and perform the same good offices between Our Old Town and far-off countries as transpire between it and the surrounding villages.

A stranger on first alighting in its sleepy-looking streets, would have thought that weddings, births, deaths, feasts, frays, robberies, the fair, a ship-launch, or market-day, were the only events that occurred worth recording, and the only changes that took place which could be at all interesting in our dreamy Old Town. Time and a long residence amongst its inhabitants would be required before he concluded otherwise ; and then he would discover that all the hopes and fears, loves and hatreds, jealousies and doubts, joys and sorrows, and every passion, feeling, and motive, by which mankind are

actuated, were all at work in that apparent ‘still-life!’ and that all the elements which make up the great human world might be found within the narrow precincts of Our Old Town. He would then have found out who had fallen in love, who had fallen in debt, who had fallen through drink; how this one got up and the other one went down, while a third went nowhere at all, but remained in the same hopeless stick-fast state from year unto year.

One portion of Our Old Town, which spreads along the shore of the busy river, was occupied by sailors’ families; and, as the men who lived so close together when at home, had berths in the same ships, went to sea, and returned to the same streets, endured the same hardships, and shared the same perils, there was a strong sympathy amongst the women, who were often severed for a long time together from their husbands—a feeling of dependence on one another, not arising from selfish motives so much as from a knowledge that those who were dear to them, and far away on the uncertain sea, were all alike exposed to the same unceasing danger. Who might be the first to need assistance and conso-

lation they could never tell until the hour of trial came—until one foot less never again trod the pavement of that little court, no more for ever.

They ever felt that those who had gone to sea so hearty and cheerful, ruddy with manly health, and full of hope in the future, they might never, in this life, look upon again. The washing of a wave over the deck, the missing of a rope, the flap of a sail, a slip of the hand or foot, might leave one less in those river-side streets, one desolate in those little houses ; and He only who giveth and taketh away could tell who would be the first to perish. On the morning that followed a terrible and tempestuous night, those whose husbands or kindred were out on the ever-gaping sea, would hurry into one another's houses—their pale faces and heavy eyelids proclaiming that they had never slept. Then one with uplifted hands would exclaim, ‘Oh ! what a night for our dear husbands on the sea ! I never closed my eyes for thinking about them.’ A second, whose haggard countenance looked like his who ‘drew back Priam’s curtains in the night,’ would then add, ‘I never went to bed at all ; I thought the night would never pass away, it seemed so long. I fear I

must have disturbed you through opening the door so often to see if it was light.' Then a third, wan and careworn, as she sat swaying her head to and fro, with downcast eyes fixed on the infant that lay asleep in her lap, would say, 'The noise the wind made woke my little Polly, and the baby could get no sleep through her shouting and wanting to know if father had come, for he will have her up whenever he comes home, though it be the middle of the night; then there's such a to-do with him. I pray God they're all safe; I thought it would have blown the roof off, when I heard the tiles come rattling down. And what must it have been on the sea?'—

Ah! what indeed!' they utter in melancholy chorus; while their tears fall afresh, and the children, seeing their mothers weep, cry also. So Sorrow, and Pity, and Hope, huddle together beforehand, and, unaware, make preparation to receive Grief, should she come in tears: for these bitter fore-tastes of what may come, enable them better to endure whatsoever an All-Wise Providence may have in store for them.

You know not which to pity most—the mother with her children, whose affection seems divided

while she gazes on them and thinks of him who is on the sea—thinks of the loss of him to her, and how it would be felt by these poor dear little things should she be left alone to provide for them—you know not which to pity most, as you turn from her to the young wife who was but married a few weeks ago, and who sits weeping for the sailor-lad that was compelled to leave her so soon after her wedding day—that day when the church bells in Our Old Town rung out so merrily, and many a ship hoisted her colours out of respect to him she had married. Oh! it was pitiful to hear the heart-rending sobs, and to see that beautiful young wife sit wringing her hands in her great agony. She would not care if they were only together—were he drowned she feels that she could sink with him as resignedly as ever she sank to sleep by his side ; all she wants is to share his danger. She would like to live longer and be happy with him, but without him she would rather die ; for if he is gone the world will be to her a ‘wide sad solitude.’ It breaks her heart to think that he may perish so far away from her : where he may never again be found—to lie amid—

‘———a thousand fearful wrecks,
A thousand men that fishes gnaw upon ;
Wedges of gold, great anchors, heaps of pearl,
Inestimable stones, unvalued jewels,
All scattered in the bottom of the sea.’

SHAKSPERE.

Ah ! it is ‘the bottom of the sea’ that pains her most, where her only jewel may then be lying—her warm-hearted, tarry-handed sailor, ‘a poor thing but her own.’ She feels that she could have followed him to our old churchyard, though every step she took would have been one nearer to her own grave, it would have afforded her ‘some little solace’ only to have known where he rested ; to have pointed the spot out to some sympathising friend while she whispered ‘he sleeps here.’ But ‘the bottom of the sea !’ where it is cold, dark, and wet, with the sand on his lips, on his eyes, in his hair ; those lips she kissed at parting ; those eyes in which a tear stood when they separated on the deck—love’s tribute from a brave manly heart, that never knew fear nor quailed at danger—eyes into which she had often looked and seen her own image ; hair, that she had played with, and twined around her fingers, while

she sat on his knee, and he sung her some old sea-song, in that deep mellow voice which she perchance might never hear again!—never, never, more. Hark! see! her colour rises! that is his whistle! his footstep is heard in the arched and sounding ‘entry;’ she rushes out and clasps him to her beating heart, exclaiming, ‘Thank God he is saved!’ That storm which she had so much dreaded, had blown his good ship homeward long before the expected hour; the fair wind now subsided to a calm that wafted back her often-hoped-for happiness.

But the long-expected one did not always arrive, though his old messmate, who perhaps lived next door, returned in safety. And she who had awaited his coming, whose footfall she would never hear more, needed no telling that he would never again cross her threshold. She knew the worst, although not a word had been spoken—knew it through his shipmate having passed her window without looking in—without once raising his eyes from the ground; that bowed head which entered the next door silent and sorrowful, told her all. Although the melancholy tidings had not been uttered, yet all her neighbours knew of her bereavement; and the

words, ‘Poor thing!’ whispered low lest they should be overheard, told how deeply they sympathised in her sorrow.

Sometimes a shrill unearthly scream, which only to hear drove the blood cold through the heart, sounded the first outbreak of despair, and summoned the pale and pitying women to her assistance.

Sometimes, she who had been so suddenly bereaved, made no sign, but swooned away in silence; then they shook their heads and said, ‘her grief lay inward,’ which meant ‘too deep for tears;’ and then they gave up all hope of her recovery. They dreaded most the sorrow that was silent—the despair that could find no utterance: they knew that for such grief no consolation could be found on this side the grave.

Then, to an observing eye, there were many little pathetic touches, that gave a sad finish to the painful picture; such as the clothes she had washed ready for his next voyage, hanging out to dry in the little yard, and which she had taken so much pains with to have them clean and white against his coming.

You could not help, while looking at them, recalling him who would never need them more—who then lay somewhere at the ‘bottom of the sea.’ You

felt that this was indeed death, falling with a darker and more awful shadow on all that had belonged to the deceased, through the absence of the remains, which are grief's sad solace.

Sometimes there were deaths through drowning in the river—at their very doors; in spots which numbers of windows overlooked.

A strange feeling came over you when you looked on the calm bright water on which the sunshine slept, and were told that the remains of some one who a few minutes before was moving about in all the pride of youth, health, and strength, was lying lifeless below. You could not help turning your gaze from the sun-lit water, that stretched like a golden pathway far along the river, to look where the dark shadows of the tall dizzy warehouses fell; at the deep walls which the dark ripples washed, for you could fancy that death lurked there, but not where the sweet sunshine played. Then boats would be seen oared slowly to and fro, from which grim grappling irons were lowered; and while you looked on, some old inhabitant said 'that there were deep unfathomable holes in the ancient river-bed, into which the bodies of the drowned were often washed,

and that they never floated again until after a heavy thunder-storm.' Then the drags would catch the cables and anchors of vessels that were moored, instead of the body that was sought for, and which from the pressure of the line and the dipping of the boat the lookers-on often thought they had found.

And on some neighbouring wharf the mother, wife, sister, or daughter of the drowned would stand, while people came from time to time and told you how she screamed and tore her hair, and how many it took to hold her back and prevent her from leaping into the river. Then you went down the wet wooden steps of these 'staithes' (as the wharves were called) that dipped into the river, and saw the immense piles of timber which supported the vast floor of the wharf that projected over the water, and upon which the light only fell here and there through the chinks above; and you felt chilly while looking upon the gloomy objects that lay below. You saw the dark slimy pillars, the massy iron clamps and ponderous bolt-heads, red with rust, and green sickly water-weeds that grew without light upon the 'warp' or silt at the foot of the heavy piles, while a death-like smell arose from the decay and damp, and sent

a cold melancholy feeling through the heart, which came over you for days after, whenever the ‘inward eye’ pictured that scene of saddened gloom. You felt that if the body of the drowned man got entangled in that network of slimy pillars and slow-waving weeds, it might lie there, amid the lapping of the black ripples, touched now and then by a thin streak of light that struggled through the chinks above, for weeks and months undiscovered.

At length you hear by the muffled murmur that the lifeless trunk is found; you look out upon the river and see it slowly heaved up, like a dead tree with its stiffened branches.

‘It answers not, nor understands.’

It is rowed ashore, carried along the street, up the arched and echoing entry into that little yard. The woman who made such bitter moan on the wharf, and who is held down in bed, knows that it has come, though she is not permitted to see it. The wet hair must be dried, it must be made to look more like itself, and then—and then—they will lead her down to her place beside the dead, while, as for him, ‘his place shall know him no more for ever.’

Some of these 'staithes' were lively and cheerful places, especially such as opened upon the river between the warehouses, or had on either hand picturesque old dwelling-houses, the windows of which reflected and flashed back the golden rippling of the water, across which the inhabitants could look, and see the flower-covered meadows and wide green open marshes that stretched far away in every direction. When the casements were open and the sun-tanned haymakers busy in the fields, the smell of sweet new hay came floating into the rooms, wafted by the refreshing breeze across the river, and filled the streets of Our Old Town. These town-staithes had been free from time immemorial, and there were neither wharfage-dues nor tolls of any kind paid on the goods delivered at these ancient landing-places. To the broad staithe-steps our townspeople came with their pails and jugs for water, and those who had to take it far placed a strong wooden hoop on the half of each pail, which enabled them, when standing inside of it, to keep the two 'buckets' a good distance apart, and carry the heavy load much further and with greater ease than they could have done without the hoop. It was amazing to see what little youths

and maidens were enabled to carry off their two heavy buckets of water by such means. Rare courting-places were these old staithes. Time out of mind they had been the meeting-places for the young of both sexes ; for the pretty servant maids came thither for water, and but seldom, I believe, without first having had 'a good look' at themselves in the glass to see how this tempting little collar or that neat little cap 'sat,' or how becomingly those carefully-tended ringlets fell—'heartbreakers,' as they used to be called by the old-fashioned people in Our Old Town. At dinner-hour or in the evenings were the times when the young men mostly loitered about these breezy staithes, and at these hours the pretty maidens so managed matters that they were then continually in want of water. And the staith-steps were generally so wet, slippery, and dangerous, that no young man with a spark of true spirit in him could stand by and see these neat-ankled, sidelong-glancing, cleverly-clad damsels descend and stand on such an insecure footing, and not offer to fill their water-vessels and carry them to the topmost landing of the stairs. Then there were alternate concessions and refusals, timid consents and sharp rebuffs, bashful

glances, blushes, and low whisperings, or angry retorts and keen encounters of wit, such as often raised the laugh against some sheepish-looking youth whose offered assistance had been rejected. Sometimes when the vessel had been filled without the pretty maiden's consent, she would empty it again and refill it herself, with a haughty toss of her head, which gave a graceful motion to her long clustering ringlets, and walk away in a 'huff,' while her would-be lover turned aside, sad, silent, and dejected, to avoid the cruel laughter which his ill-success provoked. Then the young sailors, whose ships lay beside the staith, would offer their services, and carry the pail across the decks of three or four vessels to fill it where the river ran clear and deep far from the shore. In defiance of the remonstrance of the handsome maiden, and regardless of the jeers of the lookers-on, Jack would persevere, and, after bringing it ashore, insist upon carrying it, until the final appeal of 'Oh! if you carry it any further missus will see, and then she'll go on so, and I shan't get out on Sunday,' caused the bold tar to relinquish his burthen, return and brood over the pleasant sabbath walk he should take, with her hanging on his

arm, along some of the sweet green places that stretch every way around Our Old Town. Then some of the old matter-of-fact people, who came to loiter away their time and get a breath of fresh air on the staithes, would utter hard unpleasant truths, trying to nip this tender love in the bud, as they ill-naturedly exclaimed, 'Hey, hey, my pretty lass ! it's all love and sugar-candy now, but if ever he's thy husband, he'll leave thee to dip thy pail in the best way thou canst, and be just like all the rest of' the men after they are married.'

Perchance the old woman who made these comments while she sat knitting in the sunshine, had been remarkable for the pains she took in attiring herself in her younger days, though her dress was now slovenly and untidy, and some old man, recalling what she had been, as he sat with his hand resting on his horn-headed stick, and blinking in the sunlight, would raise the laugh against her as he said, 'Ay, ay ! when I look at the clean tidy lasses that come here every day for water, I often wonder where all the dirty, slovenly wives, come from. I never find anything like them amongst the single young women. I think, old wife, it's a good deal their own faults if

they have to fill and carry their water-pails after they're married. Ay, ay ! that do I ; for dirt and slovenliness drive all love out of house and harbour.' Then the young men and maidens exchange glances with one another, and think that they shall never alter, but always be the same, as hundreds have thought before them, and will again think when they too have grown old, and careless, and untidy, and laughed at other love-makings as they sit beside these old staith-steps, which are worn hollow in the middle by the feet of departed generations. And so they made love, lived, and died, as their fathers had done before them.

Their funerals were very solemn and impressive, and they never buried their dead without placing flowers in the coffin, which, in the depth of winter, they would obtain from greenhouses, regardless of the cost ; for even the very poor would club together their few pence to purchase flowers for the dead. This custom always reminded me pleasantly of Shakspere's sweet Ophelia, who says—

‘Larded all with sweet flowers,
Which bewept to the grave did go
With true-love showers.’

Hearses or mourning coaches were seldom used by the wealthy in Our Old Town, unless the dead had to be carried to some distant part of the country, but the body was borne to the grave by those amongst whom the deceased had lived and died. The bearers were often selected before death, and this choice was considered the greatest respect the dead could pay to the living ; they liked not to be carried to the grave by the hands of strangers. The coffin was never borne on the shoulders, but by the hand. Strong handles, three or four on each side, were fastened on the coffin for this purpose, and white linen holders were passed under and drawn through the handles, one serving for two of the bearers, who had hold of each end, so that the weight of the dead fell on the centre of the strong linen 'burial-band.' The sexton heralded the funeral procession, carrying under each arm a black trestle, which he placed beneath the coffin while the bearers rested and changed sides. All who chose, without invitation, followed the dead, and it was common for every little court or yard to send out its mourner as the funeral passed, the last comer always sinking silently into the rear. The respect in which the dead was held was mea-

sured by the number of uninvited mourners who followed in the train. To me there was always something very impressive in these old-fashioned funerals ! in seeing the ‘poor inhabitant’ carried through the street, over the stones his feet had so often trod, by those with whom he had walked and talked—streets he had so often looked upon, and watched all the busy movements with so much interest ; and then to think that ‘the place he knew forgetteth him.’ The dissenters sang some hymn that had been a favourite of the deceased’s—often one that the dead had selected for the occasion—and the sound went with a strange thrill through a feeling heart, while thinking how recently that voice, which was then hushed for ever, had joined in the tune, had repeated those very words, had gone to God with them trembling on the dying lips. Excepting it were an infant, you felt the vacancy that lay around when any one had died in Our Old Town. You missed a something from ‘your daily walks and ancient neighbourhood ;’ a curly-headed child, perhaps, that was never again in your way on the pavement ; a youth or maiden you had been accustomed to look at ; an old man or woman who stood at some particu-

lar door or passage ; there was a something wanting —a something gone—and for days you could not turn your eyes from the vacancy. Then they had always a kind word for the dead, whatever fault they might have found with them while living ; they looked with the broad eye of charity over their graves, seeing only what was good, remembering only what awakened kindly feelings. With a self-accusing sigh they severed the severe links which fettered the frailties of the dead to Memory's car, and linking on only the golden chain of forgiveness, buried in the forgetting grave all misdeeds.

I often thought that this forgetting and forgiving feeling would never have extended so far as it did in Our Old Town, but for the existence of so many ancient houses ; that they seemed to stand in the streets like grey old peace-makers, as if they said, 'Look on us and consider what we have seen ; the number of dead that have been carried out of our doors ; the hearts that have ached in our chambers, through brawls that centuries ago have been hushed ; words uttered which the wealth of worlds would have been given to have recalled, could it have been obtained when at the last hour the pale face was turned

to these old cold walls.' For the whole place was stamped with antiquity, and marked with the grey impress of Time. Its old sounding gateways and hollow entries seemed to echo back a solemn voice which had been heard in the remote past—which had rung through the dim dawnings and misty twilights of the mornings and evenings of hoary and forgotten years.

Behind many of these houses were yards, or courts, in the old walls of which were iron-studded doors, that opened into the lanes or fields lying behind. The entry or passage that led into these yards was in the main street, sometimes running through the centre of the ancient houses, sometimes beside them. As there were often many houses in these courts, the street-entrance was left open all night long, but the 'back-gates,' as the doors were called, that led into the green and open spaces behind were always closed and barred and bolted at dark, the tenant of the ancient house at the front generally keeping the key of the massy lock, which prevented ingress or egress from behind after a given hour. These iron-bound gates showed that Our Old Town had been built in stormy and dangerous times, when there was more dread of the enemy descending upon it from

the wooded hills and unguarded fields than attacking it from the river, or penetrating the narrow streets. But where these courts and alleys did not run, elbowing their way behind and beside the ancient houses, daisied paddocks and high-walled gardens stretched out bright and green up to the back doors ; and many of the old tall trees threw their branches over these moss-covered walls, and above the courts, making a golden network on the pavement where the children played, while watching the quivering of the leaves. As many of these were fruit-trees, the children had luscious banquets, when the September winds blew down the juicy apples, mellow plums, and bell-shaped pears, upon the chequered pavement. Here and there among these old enclosures were busy rookeries in wind-rocked, tall, ancient elm-trees, and a pleasant sound it was to go to bed with, or be awakened by in the morning as you lay listening to the drowsy ‘caw-cawing’ or heard it in the sky, or among the trees, while the waving branches threw their moving shadows on the white window-blinds, varied at times by the reflection of the flapping wings of the dusky rooks.

Pleasant it was, too, for the working-men who

lived in these little courts to sit at their doors of an evening smoking their pipes after the day's labour was ended, watching the returning of these dark-winged foragers; or in the building season to see them quarrelling for a stick which had been purloined from some unfinished nest. But most pleasant of all was it to see the children, after a windy night, picking up the young half-fledged rooks that had been blown out of their airy cradles into the yard below, and placing them in old hats, or baskets stuffed with wool, by the fire, where, as their mothers said, 'they would soon stuff them to death through constant feeding.' And great was the amazement of the children, and loud the crying, when some little rook which they had left out for a few minutes in the sunshine was swept up and carried back by its clamorous mother to its old nest in the tall windy elm-trees. Many of the old houses fronting the street, which had formerly been ascended by steps, were now entered by descending two or three steps, while the pavement outside was nearly on a level with the window-sills, and the doorways so low that you had to bend double to enter, so high had the street been raised since those ancient houses

were first erected. The floors of these old parlours lay so deep down that you had to look up to see the feet of the passengers, which in wet weather splashed the heavily-mullioned windows with the mud and dirt that had slowly accumulated through the lapse of long centuries. The pillars of many of the porches were half-buried in the dust which time had strown, and left to harden, century after century, in the streets of Our Old Town ; and in some places where these ancient mansions fronted each other, there was barely room for a modern vehicle to pass, and when two met words and blows were sometimes exchanged before either of the drivers would draw back.

Some of these houses were standing when Chaucer wrote his 'Canterbury Tales ;' and in one of them I found an early black-letter copy of the works of this ancient English bard, on the fly-leaf of which was a register of the births and deaths of the old family in which this heirloom had so long remained. They were millers four hundred years ago, and their descendants are still in the same trade and in the same house ; the mill also stands in the same field beside the brook that it stood in when the rent was paid in eels to the neighbouring monastery, which

was laid waste at the Reformation. Though the family possess no records dating so far back as the erection of the first water-mill, they have documents which show that it had been rebuilt five times before the present windmill, which is very ancient, had been erected. Once it was destroyed by fire, once by flood, which inundated the whole of Our Old Town, and once it was struck by lightning, and twice it had to be rebuilt through sheer decay, as it had all but tumbled to the ground. There are old black-letter sentences cut on the beams of the present building, such as 'O Lord, save our mill from thunder, lightning, and the storm.' These ancient documents are still kept in an iron-lined and iron-banded chest, called by the family 'the ark,' the oak carving of which would cause quite a commotion in Wardour-street, were it displayed in that antiquity-imitating locality. What a withdrawing of the curtain from the past it would be were the present owner of the mill compelled to support his claim in a court of law on the original right of possession! The monastery centuries ago in ruins, abbot and monk dead and gone, and their very names forgotten saving in these slips of yellow parchment, which

even a scholar is now puzzled to read, so strange are the shapes of the letters, so barbarous the old bad Latin ; not a living representative on the face of the earth to put in the shadow of a claim, excepting the old miller and his heirs, and not an eel in the brook where once the mill-dam stood, to pay the rent, were these mitred lords to rise and claim it !

Many of the sports of the children in Our Old Town were strange and quaint, and I often fancied that 'Dan on the Sack' might have been played by the Danish and Saxon children, after those stormy sea-kings had, through the far-seeing wisdom of good King Alfred, settled down in our island. I seemed to be looking at the childish sports of a remote age, when I saw Dan, his mound a doorstep or kerb-stone, and his fosse a gutter, as he struggled to defend himself against all comers, he being conquered if they dragged him down, but conqueror if he pulled up one of his assailants. I also knew that the Danes once inhabited a portion of Our Old Town, and many of their ancient Gothic names are still preserved in the neighbourhood—such as Swain, Hubbat, Sleight, Haisten, Ludbrook, Steinson, showing that existing families have come down through

a long line of descent from those old invaders, who many a time compelled Alfred to lay aside his book, and take up his sword. Chiules, or boats, hewn or burnt out of the solid trunks of trees have been dug out of our old river-bed, and weapons on which Runie characters were engraved have been turned up by the peaceful ploughshare in those old battle-fields that lay every way around Our Old Town. Arrow-heads of flint, hatchets of stone, rude, worn, tessellated pavements and Roman vessels, have been dug from under its undated foundations, telling that there was a time, of which history has left no record, when far down, beneath what are now its dreamy streets, British and Roman feet trod the long-since-buried pavement of Our Old Town.





CHAPTER II.

OLD AND MODERN HOUSES—COURTS AND QUARRELS.

I OFTEN fancied that there was an expression of intelligence in some of the ancient gable-ended houses in Our Old Town; that the leaden-cased, diamond-paned windows had looked upon many scenes which we can never behold, and knew much

that we can never know, old processions, and old Christmases, marriages and merry-makings, births and deaths; that they had heard an old language which we have lost, and witnessed things of deep human interest of which time has left us no record. I sometimes watched the sunset gilding those antique lattices, and the up-pointing eaves that stood on the highest gables, until old summers and old faces seemed to come back, and I lived again amongst the departed dead, who once trod the sounding streets of Our Old Town. I pictured the children who had gazed in the days of other years through those casements, who had played on those floors with such quaint old-fashioned toys as no living eye ever since looked upon, until, in fancy, I saw the little maidens shoot up into tall beautiful girls, clothed in tight-fitting boddices, and wearing broad ruffs, and pattering about in their high-heeled shoes. I seemed to catch their stolen glances behind the heavy-mullioned windows, their whisperings in the shadowy recesses, to see the consenting blush and the happy wedding-day, when those low gloomy old porches were lighted by the reflection of bright bridal garments. I called up the long love-

locks that fell down their damask cheeks, the ‘beauty spots’ that were stuck coquettishly here and there, yet unable to disfigure the matchless sweetness of those angelic faces, and then the scene seemed to change. Other children appeared before my ‘inward eye,’ and these shot up while those grew older—she seemed to age, and he to stoop more and more every day, and then that old porch, which had been lighted by the rustling bridal garments, was darkened by the passing mourners, and the little children, now men and women, followed weeping in the train.

They returned for a little while, and were in turn carried out and wept over, and so—and so all ended. Layer above layer, they were at last all alike garnered by Death in that old churchyard, and the houses they had called their own had forgotten them. Time had obliterated their very names from the grey and weather-worn tablets, which just showed their honeycombed heads above the accumulated dust of departed generations. The crofts and garths, holms and holts, they had left for the benefit of the poor ‘for ever,’ were no longer known; the old landmarks were worn away, the

boundary-stones overthrown and lost, and in too many instances every trace of those old finger-marks of Charity utterly erased. Those old houses alone seemed to be all that remained of the past, while all beside, that had once connected them with their ancient owners, was destroyed, the living links stretched back only to be lost in impenetrable darkness—the voiceless nothingness of the grave. Not but what there were records enough here and there of a remote past—old houses whose histories were known for centuries back—still there were a few that were mysterious—that stood as if dreaming by the side of the ancient river, and listening to the lapping of its waves which broke with low murmurs on the shore; but no living soul knew by whom they were built or inhabited in the dawning of their grey antiquity. The hoary sexton might as well have asked the empty and coffinless vaults, which he sometimes stumbled upon unawares when digging a grave in the old churchyard, who had been placed therein, or how many centuries they had been forgotten.

But, quitting these ancient houses for a little while, we will peep into a few of the interiors of the

more modern ones ; though there is nothing very modern, when compared with what is so called in the larger English cities, to be found in Our Old Town. Nearly everything about it seemed tinged with a shadow of the past, as if the few changes that had taken place were made slowly and almost unperceived, done as it were without a noise, fearful to break the dreamy tranquillity that brooded over our sleepy old streets, or disturb the comfortable silence under which we had so long safely dozed.

There was something of a family likeness, both in the furniture, and the manner of arranging it, in the generality of the houses in Our Old Town ; for as very few of them contained passages, when the door was opened, you entered at once into the principal apartment, which was always called 'the house' : the back-room, or side-room, and kitchen all bore the latter names, but the room which you first entered from the street, passage, yard, or lane, was called 'the house,' and only known by that name. In this room the household took their meals ; there the householder was found at the head of his table, and there also the housewife sat at her work. Here the mistletoe and holly were hung at Christmas ; in this

apartment the christening was kept ; into it the happy bridegroom first led the blushing bride after the marriage-ceremony was over ; and here the coffin stood on the day of the funeral, before the dead was borne over that threshold, for the last time for ever. Some old heirloom, such as a desk, a set of drawers, or a clock in a tall wooden case, and sometimes the large dining-table—but always with a chair on each side—stood fronting the fire and nearest the door as you entered, and, with the exception of the clock, this central piece of furniture was generally covered with green baize, and surmounted with a ‘tea-tray.’ This was ornamented with a ship in full sail, if the housholder were a sailor, sometimes a parrot with a bunch of cherries in its beak ; or, if the housewife were a farmer’s daughter, the tea-board would be decorated with a sheep, a cow, a milkmaid, and a tree or two : nor was it ever used excepting on rare occasions, such as at a feast or fair-time, or when country relations came on a visit, or some such holidays. Beside the tea-board a few ‘good books,’ as they were called, covered also with green baize, were placed on this old heirloom, and these were mostly ‘The Holy Bible,’ ‘Life of Christ,’ ‘Pilgrim’s Pro-

gress,' 'Holy Living and Dying,' 'Baxter's Saint's Rest,' 'Josephus,' and a few similar works, which were generally read the most on the sabbath. Above the tea-board hung a looking-glass, or, a sampler which had been worked at school in different-coloured worsted, or else a Christmas piece, with little coloured pictures from the 'Book of Ruth,' or 'Joseph and his brethren,' forming a border, and in the centre a specimen of the householder's fine Roman hand, executed when he was a schoolboy. Nor was this side of the house considered complete by the systematic inhabitants of Our Old Town, unless, over each chair that stood sentry on either side this piece of furniture, a picture was suspended, and these would often be from Pilgrim's Progress, containing all the principal incidents in that world-wide well-known work, which were brought together at once before the eye by a series of winding roads that ran from right to left and back again, beginning at the bottom corner with the dark Slough of Despond and terminating at the top with a bright burst of the Celestial City. King Charles's 'Twelve Golden Rules' was also another popular print, and amongst sailors an engraving of the destruction of the Spanish

Armada. Many of the older houses also contained little waxen images in glass frames, of the Virgin and Child, St. John and his Lamb, and other scriptural figures, often nearly black through age, and recalling the relics of an older religion than any then followed in Our Old Town. If you inquired where they came from you always found that they had been in the family for numbers of years, and that no one could remember when they were first new. A triangular-shaped cupboard fitted in the corner with a glass door, and this was called the corner cupboard, and in it the old china, glass, and other similar treasures were kept. It had always an attractive look, and great taste was displayed in arranging the miscellaneous articles it contained, which were often old and valuable: the large china punch-bowl, which was rarely used, stood out prominently, with its quaint figures inverted, and often on the bottom of it the best tea-pot would be placed, like a conqueror, trampling down its rival in old festivities, and proclaiming that the social cup now so much quaffed, is no longer the inebriating bowl around which our boisterous ancestors gathered. Underneath this elevated cupboard generally stood what these old-

fashioned-people called 'the stand,' a round table with three carved feet, above which sprang a pillar, supporting a top that could be turned up, and which, when folded and put away, occupied no more room than a round shield would have done had it hung suspended in the same place. The lower portion of the chairs, desk, and table feet, were often protected by little fringed covers, feathered to the very ground like bantam-fowls, to shield them from the point of a clumsy shoe, and save them from the splashes of the water and red-ochre, which were used in cleaning these primitive brick-floors, that were very conducive to coughs and colds, to all saving the seasoned inhabitants of Our Old Town. As for sitting out of the draught that was impossible, there being no passage, so that the wind was always either blowing in at the front or the back-door; but as they often said 'they could not live without plenty of fresh air, and to stifle themselves up would soon be the death of them,' often the back-door opened at the foot of the stair-case door, while on the other side was a closet, so that all the three doors were together, and when open fell over each other, like gold laid on gold in bad heraldry. Above this closet door was a little

recess, in which the tin tinder-box, with its flint and steel, and brimstone-dipped matches, the candlesticks, lantern, and lamp in which train-oil was burnt, were placed. A novice, in reaching anything down from this crowded shelf, would have been pretty sure to have brought the whole contents about his ears—lamp, oil, and all. Then there would have been a ‘pretty to do,’ and no end of red-ochre used to give the old cherry look to the brick floor, or of pipe-clay to restore the snowy whiteness to the stone hearth, both of which after a thorough cleaning were always prettily sprinkled with sand—a substance that did not at all improve the children’s bread and butter when it fell, although I believe they ate it up, sand and all; nor do I ever remember an instance in which it was necessary to call in a doctor after they had swallowed the gritty compound. Then they had a large store of earthenware vessels, of all kinds of ancient shapes, in which they kept their bread, water, flour, and meat, and almost every other household necessary. They all seemed to have been cast in antique moulds, many of them resembling in form those Roman-British vessels, which are dug out of undated barrows, and found beneath

grey cairns where England's oldest dead have been sepulchred. Quaint-looking objects were those little 'stodgy' pot-bellied honey and pickle-jars, that appeared as if they had grown fat on the good things they had contained; even the children's money-pots, made of the same material, and the contents of which could not be got at until they were broken, had an old buried-in-the-earth sort of shape, and you fancied that the pots of money that were so often hidden in the old story books were of a similar form. Many of the fire-places were also lined with blue and white Dutch tiles, with figures on them that might have been copied from the old wood-cuts in the earliest editions of the 'Ship of Fools,' and you could amuse yourself for hours in looking at those strange pot-pictures, when the shifting fire-light played upon them, throwing ruddy streaks on the dazzling whiteness, and carrying fancy far away into a dream-land peopled with all those blue and white scenes, and oddly-attired figures. Wicker-chairs with high backs, and large checked or plaided coverings, such as are seldom seen now excepting in old pictures, often stood in shadowy nooks beside these picturesque hearths, and added a look of ancient and undisturbed

comfort to the scene ; while overhead, bright brass, copper, block-tin and steel utensils, caught up and flashed back the mellowing blaze, and threw it down here and there in flashes, like golden sunlight, upon the walls and floor, or playing upon the ceiling ‘gilded the roof with mirth,’ as that true old English poet Herrick has described it. Like a sun, the large brass warming-pan, which made bed feel so comfortable on a cold winter night, caught the largest portion of the blaze on its indented birds and flowers, and seemed to laugh again as it stood surrounded by its glittering satellites.

Such were the generality of the interiors, and the usual plan of arranging the furniture in most of the houses in Our Old Town ; nor was the outward appearance of numbers of those quaint residences less picturesque. At the ‘town-end’ as it was called, there was a row of old-fashioned houses with a little field lying before the doors, beyond this the high-road and the river, and over the latter the bridge here spanned away to other fields, and footpaths, and sweet green villages, which these cosy, dreamy, odd-shaped little houses overlooked. Then a boat-builder had somehow or another managed to steal a

portion of the shore, near the first arch of the bridge, and there was often a smell of tar, and the aroma of wood, and the sound of the shipwrights hammering in the little yard, and quite a stir of busy life at the bridge-foot, which it was pleasing to behold. And sometimes that little field was sown with corn, which, when ripe and waving, you delighted to look over from those old peaceful houses, to the half-finished boat on the stocks, the blue gleaming of the river, the bridge over which some drover was passing with his cattle, while the green country beyond lay steeped in sunset that ever changed its hue ; shooting bands of crimson, purple, and yellow from the swift-shifting shuttles of the sky, that kept up a golden darting over the many-coloured landscape. Far away from some of these pleasantly-placed houses, you saw, like a picture in an arched-frame, the winding river, the green fields, and the blue sky, under the bridge, while some distant vessel softened the rounding-rim with its snow-white sail, and broke the brown foreground of the spanning arch, the blue of the river, and the green of the winding embankments, with a silvery softness that melted into the receding sky. But the little row of

houses were what a painter would have seized upon for the foreground of his picture, for they were rich as the stems of old forest trees in weather-stained hues of grey and brown, that here and there deepened into umbery shadows of every variety.

Sometime, one or another of these old houses had been white-washed, but the colour seemed to have shrunk up, and withered the walls, and left the grey-spanning timbers sticking out like bleached bones. Here one was roofed with thatch, another with little red tiles, on which all sorts of creeping plants grew, but most of all stone-crop, which, when in flower, lay here and there like a burst of golden sunlight between the brown and barer gables. And every little ridgy attic-window had a tiled and sloping covering of its own ; and every projecting out-house had a roof to itself, and little apartments, that went over porches and pantries, and which were reached by wooden steps, covered with an awning of all sorts of coloured tiles, and so steep that you wondered how the sparrows could walk up them, had also separate roofs, that stood out independent of any other portion of the building ; and this was covered with green moss, and that with silver lichen,

and the other with yellow creepers, while here a mass of ivy climbed up, and there the branches of a tree hung down, making such a pleasing variety of light and shade, that for days after, and when miles away, the eye of memory kept ever calling up and looking at the pleasant picture. Though many of these quaintly-shaped rooms, were ascended by covered staircases from without, others equally primitive were reached by stout wooden ladders from within, which being reared against the square, doorless, and uncovered opening communicated at once with the low chamber, where you could only stand upright in the middle of the apartment. They called going to bed ‘climbing the wooden-ladder,’ and when about to retire for the night, would sometimes say, after a few sleepy yawns,

‘If I *was* in bed, and fast asleep,
I would not get up for a flock of sheep.’

Many of these chamber-floors were of plaster, and as but few carpets were used, they felt cold as ice under the bare feet in winter.

On the fronts of many of these houses were trained fruit-trees; and beautiful they looked in spring,

covered with white and crimson blossoms, and at the close of summer, or early in autumn, hung with mellow sun-stained fruit. The inhabitants of this neighbourhood, who were called the 'down-towners,' were a more homely class of people than the 'up-towners;' for (as in London) there is a kind of West-end even in our slow-moving Old Town. According to the course of the river and the flowing of the tide, that which they call 'down-town,' is really 'up-town,' from the sea; and they admit the error, but say, 'it has always been so called.' The 'up-towners'—whether on account of the market-place, the better class of shops, or what beside I could never rightly tell—hold their heads higher than the 'down-towners,' and consider the latter as standing a little lower in the social scale, who somehow I thought admitted the distinction, by tidying themselves up a bit whenever they had to go 'up-town.' At the 'town-end' they would go about with coats off, bare-headed, knees unbuttoned, shoes down at the heels, or in any easy slip-shod-sort-of-way, and no one would make a remark, for many of them paid but little regard to appearances compared to the 'up-towners.' Up-town, the young

women who made dresses were called milliners and mantua-makers ; down-town, a boldly-written card would stand in the window announcing the stark-naked truth, and without any preliminary flourish of ‘Miss,’ tell you that within dwelt ‘Ann Page, dressmaker.’ Plain Ann Page went out to work anywhere for eighteen-pence a day and her ‘meals ;’ and it was all alike to her whether she made a coarse strong gown for household work, a wedding garment, or stuff frocks for children—her charge was just the same when she worked out. There was great economy in this plan, for those who employed her by the day could assist, though unable to cut out and make a perfect garment—so double the work was done ; and there were many thrifty wives in Our Old Town.

Even among poor families, it was ‘a white-loaf-day’ for the children when the humble dressmaker came to do a day’s work, as there was mostly on such occasions a baked dinner—a great event on a week-day—and instead of the customary ha’porth of small-beer, a pint of ale, out of which, if they behaved themselves, they were allowed a sip. Of course all the neighbourhood knew when the dress-

maker was about to be employed ; not only through the house undergoing an extra cleaning on the previous day, but also through the material that was about to be made up having undergone a from-house-to-house examination, to obtain opinions as to how it would wash, and how it would wear. Not that the 'down-towners' were always on such friendly terms with one-another, for they often had what they called 'a frash,' and then, oh dear, how their tongues did but run ! When they quarrelled it all came out—how this dress had been obtained, and that piece of furniture got ; what this one had sold, and that one had borrowed ; whose gown had been turned, or bonnet cleaned, and passed off as new—all was exposed. Not a make-shift, or any little contrivance to appear genteel, but what was dragged from its hiding-place ; when day and date were given, the very colour the dress was dyed, the exact amount paid for the coat that was turned, and what this party had told that party in confidence—out all came. During the 'wordy war' they were all out in the little yard, buzzing like bees ; and if any one tried to act as mediator, the voice was drowned amid their deafening clamours, which only subsided when

every charge had been re-repeated, and every subject of grievance exhausted. Then only one or two would remain, to explain what they meant, in contradistinction to what they had said, and after a few more last words, the noise of voices, and the slamming of doors would cease, though the old usual calm had not as yet brooded down over the cackling court, for there were stolen interviews, and private explanations, and quiet creepings to and fro; and spies belonging to each party would be on the watch, with doors ajar, or standing half concealed, peeping out of the corners of the slightly-uplifted window-blinds, to see into whose houses those went whom they believed to be ‘double-faced:’ and when they saw any one ‘who had spoken fair before their faces, and foul behind their backs’ enter some house, they would give a peculiar ‘cluck-cluck,’ by striking the tip of the tongue against the roof of the mouth, then exclaim, ‘Well, I never! the deceit of that woman’s beyond everything. Why I heard her say’—then the dyed dress, the turned coat, the old bonnet altered into the newest fashion,—all of which had been told to them by ‘that bad, double-faced woman’—would be again shaken to and fro, and

made to appear in as great a variety of new forms as the shifting colours in a kaleidoscope. But these little storms, which seemed almost as necessary as wind to stagnant water, by making the court more wholesome after they had blown over, never lasted long ; and when they 'made it up' they fairly ran after one another to perform acts of kindness. The borrowings and lendings were unlimited : they hardly knew what to do to show that they bore no malice—to prove that they meant no harm ; for as they said, 'it was but a frash,' and when it was over they thought no more about it. Then they lent both soda and blue-bag, and insisted not only in carrying the wash-tubs into one another's houses, but actually would rinse out any few little things in their 'nice hot suds,' to save a neighbour the trouble of washing at all. For weeks after there was no contending for a share of the clothes-line ; no struggling to get possession of the clothes-prop ; and as for the mangling-woman ! her hard place was quite a sinecure—she had only to sit down and take her rest, for there was always a kind, friendly dispute amongst them as to who should turn the mangle ; and as the old woman used to say—' If it wasn't for a bit of a

“frash” amongst them now and then, I should have to give up mangling altogether, for I should be fairly worked off my legs. I always have a bit of rest for my poor old bones after they have had a good fall-out, for then it’s all “my love,” and all “my honey.””

But these little acts of kindness did not satisfy them—the restoration of peace must be celebrated ; and the first fine day the pledge was ratified in the open yard, over what they called ‘a good strong friendly dish of tea,’ which was their old-fashioned ‘loving-cup.’ Then tables were set out in the little court, and each contributed her share of tea, which was placed inside their great reconciler—the largest tea-pot that they could borrow ; and so they forgot and forgave, and, as they said, ‘were better friends than ever.’ And once more they talked of Billy’s measles, and Sally’s cough ; what cured Jacky’s chil-blains ; how this was good for a burn, and that a most excellent thing for a scald ; what benefit Nelly derived from the other when cutting her teeth ; and so they, in the openness of their hearts, and in their eagerness to assist one another, run over ‘all the ills that flesh is heir to,’ enumerating every application

and cure that had ever been practised since the days of their great-grandmothers.

As it was with the wives, so it was with the husbands, who also had their likes and dislikes, their fallings out and fallings in ; quarrelling one day, and shaking hands 'over a gill of ale' and making it up another. Sometimes, but very rarely, they had a little law, and then the whole of Our Old Town was in a ferment, for there were generally as many in favour of the plaintiff as there were for the defendant. For days and days before the trial, the case was argued over at the entrance of every little court ; by the shopkeepers and their customers ; in the parlours of the public-houses ; and the 'dressing' that this councillor would give the other, or the cross-examination that some witness would have to undergo, were entered into with a real sportsman-like spirit. They never could have lived had they not had 'a bit of law' now and then : beside, what they did, and said, and saw at the assize-town, served them to talk about for weeks and months after the trial.

As for a downright, straightforward, unmistakeable robbery, it set the whole of Our Old Town in

commotion—it was quite beside itself on such an occasion ; it nearly run mad with excitement. Crowd followed crowd to look at the house—to peep in at the door—to stare, in speechless amazement at first, through the window, and at the man who had been robbed. Oh ! what a mighty man you became if you only received a nod or a word from the head-constable, as he went in or out of the house that had been plundered ! You knew something about it—you must do, or he would never have recognized you on such an occasion, so much as he must then have had on his mind ; you grew famous all at once. As for the constable himself, he was unapproachable—too great to be allied with any one ; he was the law, justice—the executioner ; the crowd opened and made way for him in dumb wonderment. Even Mrs. constable grew all at once into a great personage ; and mighty high did they carry their heads who were intimate with her ; she was part and parcel of the majesty of the law ! 'Her husband might be killed in the execution of his duty,' she said ; 'he had gone out with loaded pistols to hunt for the robber, and if he resisted, oh dear ! oh dear !' Her gossips made her have a little brandy in her tea, and

wondered that she had strength to endure such a trial. Then two or three would remember seeing some strange man that had visited Our Old Town ; and getting into a corner, they would make it appear as plain as the road across the bridge, where he was last seen, that he must have been the thief. Then they would begin to think, and wonder, and try to see if it were likely, knowing what they did, that they should have to appear as witnesses : and so they went on, until they arrived at the conclusion that nothing at all could be done unless they were consulted ; when lo ! just as they began to be somebody, on the strength of the strange man who crossed the bridge, the real thief was found nearer home, and they shrunk through the street silent and discomfited.

I often wonder whether that great commotion—that terrible time—that hard struggle for our rights and liberties—will ever be forgotten, when an attack was made on the little winking, blinking oil-lamps, which had so long been the light and ornament of our streets, by a few daring innovators, who rose up and proposed that Our Old Town should be lighted with gas ! Ah ! well can I remember that good old

local preacher and leather-breeches maker, getting up at the stormy meeting in the Moot-hall, and through his spectacles reading an account of a dreadful gas-explosion, which had blown out a shop-front, and singed the hair of the proprietor, and the deep shouts of applause that followed, when dropping his newspaper he looked round, and said ‘ Is it not a tempting of Providence? Is it not an invention of the Evil One for our destruction?’ And on the following sabbath, what a congregation he had! and how clearly he convinced many who were present that Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed by gas! No; Our Old Town was never intended to be lighted with gas; its arched entries, winding passages, secluded yards, and echoing gateways, ought to have been left slumbering in their old darkness; no new-fangled glaring light ought ever to have awakened those sleeping shadows, nor any other sound have startled the still midnight that reigned over its hushed streets, than—

‘ The bellman’s drowsy charm,
To bless the door from nightly harm.’

The big-bellied lamps, with their red conical tops,

which the lame lamplighter put on his head while rubbing the glass round with a handful of tow, were more in keeping with our ancient streets and gable-ended houses, whose overhanging windows were on a level with the iron scroll-work in which the lamps were sunk, and caught on their diamond-shaped lead-enclosed panes, and in their deep-bayed and shadowy recesses, fitful glimmerings and bright dots of dusty splendour from the red smoky flames.

And when the moon was at the full, the lamps were never lighted, but when she sunk behind the fields beyond the river, Our Old Town was left in darkness, and folded in sleep—a slumber that only the alarm of fire, murder, or robbery would have broken, as it jarred upon the doors, and shook the drowsy casements. I have paused in the deep shadow of those overhanging gables, and pictured the consternation that fell upon Our Old Town on that dark night, when Cromwell, at the head of his grim Ironsides, stole a march upon the Royalists, and shook the sleeping streets with the tramp of his horses, while knock after knock thundered at the hollow-sounding doors as he summoned the inhabitants to rise, and make provision for his armed fol-

lowers. The road by which he came, and the lane by which he entered, stooping his helmeted head as he passed under the dark low-browed archway, before riding into the open street, are still unaltered ; and the very doors by which his stern soldiers passed, when billeted on the alarmed populace, are the same that echoed back the clang of their jingling accoutrements on that terrible night. And the old inhabitants still talk over the tales which their great-grandfathers told, and which have been handed down through departed generations, of pistol-shots that were fired, of swords clashing in the streets, of wounded men falling under this archway, and dead men lying in that passage, for there were stubborn spirits then in Our Old Town, who refused to unbar their doors at the bidding of Cromwell, but fought and fell under the cry of ‘ Long live King Charles ! ’ Here and there doors are still shown which were perforated by bullets, and hacked by swords, and which grey-headed men still living can remember their grandfathers pointing out when they themselves were children, and in the churchyard there are still grey and weather-beaten tombstones standing over the graves of those who fought and fell when that stout leader of the Roundheads shook the ancient

walls of Our Old Town. The old miller has still the 'Chirurgeon's Bille' for curing the shattered arm of his ancestor, which was struck by a bullet when he refused to yoke his horses to the cart, and carry the luggage of the Parliamentary soldiers. And in the iron-bound box kept in the hoary church, among other memorandums is that stout old Royalist's receipt for 'Three groates per diem, for twenty-nine dayes lost worke at ye milne bye ye gunne-shotte wounde made bye ye rebbles,' proving that the loyal Old Town took some care of those who suffered in the cause of King Charles. But gas-lamps now throw their glare on the mullioned windows on which the pistol-shots of those grim Ironsides flashed; and other changes are slowly taking place which will at last strangely alter the long familiar features of Our Old Town.





CHAPTER III.

WALKS, WOOINGS, WEDDINGS, AND LOVE-BIRDS.

OUR forefathers must have taken a great deal of out-of-door exercise, if such a conclusion may be drawn from the number and variety of walks around our old-fashioned town. They would have looked like network on a drawing, so often did they

intersect one another, running up-hill, and down-hill, lengthways and crossways, making sharp angles here, and sweeping into graceful curves there, in this place winding above the hills, in that over their undulating sides or extending along their feet, there stretching through the very centre of the valley, and coming out and going in, at the most unexpected and picturesque places. It seemed to me that these old roads and walks had been laid out by our ancestors to suit every mood of mind, and state of health. If they wished to breathe themselves, they need but cross a single field, or so, or step up a short sweet green lane, and there lay the steep hills before them, and if they felt very meditative, they had only to pursue their course beyond the brow of the hills, and any of the long flower-bordered lanes would lead them into the ancient woods, where they might commune with themselves in the midst of those 'green-robed senators' the trees. Did they wish to linger and gaze over the varied landscape, they had only to pause and look down and far away, and there it lay at their feet, with Our Old Town in the valley and the river winding along to the right and to the left through immense stretches of country that faded in

the sunshine or blended with the sky, for there was no boundary but the horizon to the distance. Did they seek only a little gentle exercise, there were footpaths every way in the fields that brought their daisies almost close to the doors of the town, and they had but to cross the road to enter these grassy and flower-painted pastures. If they wished to breathe the cool air by the river, there the banks went curving by shady willows that seemed to give a silvery quiver as they bent beneath every breeze that blew. Or they might wander along raised terraces and broad 'rampers,' with water-courses on each side, where the black bulrushes nodded, and tall flags swayed at every ripple, and dragon-flies spread their gauze wings in the sunshine, and which led on into sweet little villages by gardens and old orchards that called up images of Eden, and that looked pure and beautiful and retired enough for angels to walk through. Or there were solemn lanes, with hedges so old, and high, and thick that an army must have halted before them until a passage had been made either by sharp axes or a destructive fire; you could not see through them in summer, they spread so wide, and went so far back, and were

so thickly covered with leaves. And on the raised footways beside the high-roads you might walk, or step into the fields behind the hedge, through which other footpaths ran, the hedgerow alone intervening between the two walks, which every here and there branched off and went up towards the hills, as if they tried to tempt and lead you away into the green solitudes beyond ; for there were woods and walks beside them and through them, and long plantations filled with bowery hollows, where the 'merle and mavis' built and sang. And in these walks thatched granges and snug sequestered cottages burst upon you unawares, like pleasant thoughts, and pretty faces peeped at you through little lattices, over which woodbines and roses trailed, content to wreath their sweets around the beauty that dwelt within. And there were friendly visitings and mutual interchanges between these Thorpes and the Town. The country people had a 'morsel' of dinner or a 'dish' of tea with the townspeople on market-days, and the latter went now and then, when the flowers were in bloom or the fruit in season, or when it was the sheep-shearing feast, or at the harvest home, by way of a return, to partake of

the country hospitality, though the same viands were brought fresh every week to their own doors. And oh those artful old mothers ! if they had made up their minds that there should be a match, a match there was sure to be—though a blind man might have seen through every little harmless artifice. They beat about the bush in their own old-fashioned way, and the town-mother would say, as she walked in followed by her Jacky, to the country-mother and her blushing daughter, ‘ How dost thee do, Mrs. Kitchen ? thou sees I’ve brought thy Betty a sweet-heart.’ At which announcement Betty would titter, leave off whatever she might be doing, and run to hide herself in the dairy. Jacky, who had a little the most courage of the two, perhaps saying, ‘ Laws, mother, how can thee go on so ? thoult frighten th’ young woman into fits.’ Then the country-mother would perhaps say, ‘ Fits indeed ! she’s only run away to see if thoult run after her, I dare say thou could’st find something to say to her if thou wert to try, as thy father did afore thee. Thoult find her i’ the dairy, or somewhere else, no doubt, trying to make herself as smart as a new pin. The lasses are all alike, all they think about is getting husbands

and leaving their fathers and mothers to “fend” for themselves.’ Then perhaps his mother would say, ‘Get along with thee, Jacky, and if thou hast her consent thou hast mine. She’s a good bairn, and thou may’st go further and fare worse.’ So Jacky would be bundled out almost, to court Betty whether he liked it or not. And without further ceremony would the ice be broken, and ten to one she would show him over the garden and the orchards and the fields that belonged to the little homestead. Then the old man would come in from somewhere, all of a heat and covered with hay-seeds, and have his ‘mug of beer,’ and put in a word now and then, while the women talked over what they could give ‘the bairns’ towards providing a house, and helping them ‘to settle in the world.’ And so all would soon be arranged, for neither party sought to take advantage, but often said ‘They’ll have all at the last, when we’re dead and gone, so it’s as broad as it’s long.’ Then Jacky, who ‘had learnt a trade,’ would get married, and in time, perhaps, ‘set up’ in business, and his pretty country-wife would soon learn to serve in the shop, so that what with the bacon, butter, cheese, eggs, potatoes, and baskets of fruit

sent by the 'old people'—as they were always called—every now and then by the carrier, (who never passed a week without leaving something,) they would have to expend very little beyond what was required for coal, clothes, rent and taxes. Many a pleasant trip would they have to that picturesque cottage on a Sunday, or to join in some rural merry-making, and he would leave her there for a day or two to ride home after him in the old carrier's grey tilted cart, as he had to return to attend to business. Then in time they would be seen taking with them first one child, then two or three, and she would remain at the cottage with them for a few weeks in the summer, and so other Bettys and other Jackys would spring up into women and men, and the 'old people' would die, and others in time would be found almost as old, in possession of the cottage, and their grandchildren would be brought over on Sundays, and remain a few weeks in the summer, return, be put out apprentice, marry, and perhaps set up in business.

Then there were the daughters of the large and wealthy farmers who, sometimes, came for a few months to learn millinery in Our Old Town ; for a

quarter of a century ago, this was considered a necessary accomplishment, and there were but few well-to-do yeoman's daughters but what could make their own dresses and light summer bonnets. Their sons also came, and were clerks on the wharves, or in the counting-houses, and in time became wharfingers, corn-merchants—had shares in the warehouses, and the ships; or returned to farming, perhaps, with enlarged notions of business, and a knowledge of new channels into which agricultural produce might be launched, such as their fathers had never dreamed of. The daughters of this class were called 'young ladies,' and the sons 'young gentlemen,' and were considered to stand in a much higher position than that of a shopkeeper, by the inhabitants of Our Old Town. And Miss Etherington, the head milliner in Our Town, always called those who came to her for instructions, 'her young ladies,' and they in return always called her Miss Etherington. But oh! she was such an old woman to be called Miss—Mother would have seemed a better word; for the juvenile airs she assumed, such as trying to trip out of the back room into the shop whenever a gentleman called, only made her 'young

ladies' laugh behind her back, while she herself appeared ridiculous, in spite of her false teeth and false curls. I believe many of her 'young ladies' came solely to get 'sweathearts' and husbands, and that learning the millinery business was only an excuse for leaving the large lonely farm-houses, and spending a few months in Our Old Town; for they were generally very pretty, and all the young clerks aspired to the hands of Miss Etherington's 'young ladies.' Then courting commenced by the clerks meeting the 'young ladies' when they went out for a walk in the fields, or round the 'backway,' at dinner time, or in the evening; both youths and maidens being always neatly dressed, in a style becoming, as they considered, their gentlemanly and lady-like occupations. The ice once broken, the lover would perhaps venture so far as to call and leave a book addressed to Miss Blank, care of Miss Etherington, Lady's Milliner, &c.; for Miss Etherington was very particular, and never allowed her 'young ladies' to receive or read any books which she did not approve of, nor any gentleman to have an interview with them in her establishment, without the consent of the lady's parents. The

correspondence was immense, scarcely a country carrier left the town on market day, without taking out a parcel marked 'confidential' from Miss Etherington. The presentation of the book, and the frequent interviews, soon became matter of talk in Our Town, where it was difficult for anything to remain long a secret; and as regarded the 'young lady's' parents, Miss Etherington had taken care to inform them how matters stood. It was amazing what presents she received from the country; her maidens said she was almost always writing letters. Then Miss Blank's father, who called to see his daughter every market day, walked in with his whip in his hand, his long spurs sticking out behind, and his gold seals sticking out before, with his 'How do, Miss Etherington? and how's our Polly?'—he had always called her Polly, and should do, as he sometimes said, 'if she married the proudest lord in the land.' Then Polly would come running out, and he would kiss her, such a smack! it could be heard all over the place; then he would say, 'So I hear thou'st picked up a sweetheart—oh you sly little puss!' and he would shake his whip at her good-naturedly, while Miss Etherington, who

had written him the full particulars, would lift up her hands and eyes in affected amazement, with a ‘Well I never!’ Then Mary blushing and looking down abashed, would stammer out something about young Hewardine, and his kindness, and how he was a most gentlemanly young man—and the honest farmer, pinching her cheek perhaps, would cut the matter short by saying, ‘Well, well, he’s a decent young man enough. I know all about him, tell him to come up to my inn and have a glass of wine; and do you hear, Polly, come with him, and call me out into the private room.’ And off he would hurry into the corn market to show the yellow sample bags with which his great pockets were stuffed, perhaps first whispering to Miss Etherington that his wife had come to market with him, and that he ‘wanted to give Polly a surprise.’

Like a nest of startled birds, all the ‘young ladies’ are in a flutter in the workroom, for there are few secrets that they keep from one another, and they are all fond of Mary. How is she to communicate with young Hewardine? Market day too; how unfortunate! when he is so busy at the wharf; what with market boats and carriers’

carts, how provoking! the only day in the week in which she does not see him until they have their evening walk. After a long consultation, and when every young lady in the establishment has offered her opinion, the plan that naturally suggested itself to Mary in the first instance, is adopted; a note must be written, and Miss Etherington's permission for the servant to take it, obtained. So Mary, who has never had occasion to write to him before, retires, and as she does not understand the 'Miss So-and-so's compliments' sort-of-style, she is sadly at a loss how to begin. 'Dear Sir,' she thinks too familiar, and only 'Sir,' too cold. She hurries down stairs, and borrows the 'Lady's Complete Letter Writer' of one of her companions, but that does not help her at all. However, she gets through it somehow in the saw-tooth style, the only legible letters being the capitals, with L, T, and U, now and then forming a longer tooth by way of variety; and fortunate it is that she sends a verbal message by the servant along with the note, requesting the young clerk to call on her as soon as possible. But for that, with all his love, he would never have found out the purport of the note. He comes, he

enters the establishment smart as a bridegroom, he receives a cold recognition from that juvenile-antique, Miss Etherington, who, although she knows all about the matter, rings the bell, and sends the servant with a formal message, and 'a young gentleman of the name of Hewerdine requests to speak to Miss Blank on business of importance.' The 'young ladies,' who are peeping at him through the curtain that covers the glass door, have hardly time to regain their seats before the smiling servant enters with 'Miss Etherington's compliments,' &c. When Mary, all blushed and elegantly dressed, appears, Miss Etherington fairly lets the 'cat out of the bag,' by bidding her be sure and thank her father for the couple of beautiful ducks and the hamper of splendid fruit he had been good enough to send her; and, as the milliner's character is pretty well known, the remarks the young man makes about her usual 'perquisites,' afford Mary much merriment as they walk arm-in-arm to the inn at which her father dines.

And there is something very characteristic about the inns in Our Old Town. For sailors, there is the Ship Inn, Neptune Inn, Sir Francis Drake, and

Royal George ; for farmers, the White Lamb, Black Horse, Brown Cow, Waggon and Horses ; for millers and malsters, the Windmill and Hop-pole ; for Conservatives, the Crown and Cushion ; and for Liberals, the Old Cromwell's Head. The landlords of these houses were always in keeping with their signs, and understood something of the calling which they 'served under.' He who kept a sailor's sign knew the larboard from the starboard side of a ship, and he who managed a house to which the farmers resorted, knew a cow from a calf ; for none but a sailor would ever think of taking the Ship Inn, nor any but a farmer become landlord of the Wheatsheaf. Thus if you went into the one and inquired what quarter the wind was in, or when it would be high water, you could be answered ; or if into the other, and asked how crops were progressing, you were told all about the high lands and low lands, the havoc of the wire-worm, want of rain, and the price of grain per quarter at all the surrounding market towns. Mary's father puts up at the Barley Mow, as it faces the corn market, and as he can from the window hail any one he wishes to speak with, and there young Hewardine has a very

pleasant interview with the farmer and his wife, for the choice has met with the approval of his own father. That day Mary goes home with her mother, for it is a most important day to her, and the young clerk is invited to visit there on Sunday. But he must now go into the great 'market-room,' and his intended father-in-law 'will have no nay;' he must shake hands with some of the old farmers, whom he dines with every week, and who, as he says, 'have known Polly ever since she was a child.' So the young lover enters, and is introduced as my 'future son-in-law,' and he shakes hands and takes wine with them, and it soon gets into his head, for he has never been used to it. Then to let them see that he knows something, as his tongue loosens, he begins to talk of corn, and wool, and malt, and how much they ship from their wharf, from whom they have the most, and whither it goes; and as Mary's father also grows warmer with the wine, and more delighted with what he calls 'our Polly's choice,' he begins to clap him on the back, and say 'He'll do, won't he? They shall have a good wedding dinner, and I can give my Polly a plum, I think, on her wedding day.' Then he laughs, and his brother

farmers laugh, as he turns round and asks them if they do not think that he can 'give his Polly a plum,' for they all know he is rich. Then the honest old farmer rises to propose her health, and in spite of the wine he has drank, his voice trembles with emotion, and a tear stands unaware in his eye, while in his plain and unadorned language, he gives utterance to his feelings, and speaks of her as having ever been a good and dutiful daughter. Then some other farmer has known the young man's father for a many years, and he begins by telling what dealings they have had together, and what markets they have attended in their time, and he is sure that the son will prove as good a man as the father. And now the young lover, whom wine has emboldened, rises to return thanks, and make a speech, right proud of the opportunity, for before he devoted so much of his time to courting, he had been a member of a debating society, which consisted of young men like himself, and at which they discussed such subjects as 'If your wife and mother were to fall into the water, and you could only save one of them from drowning, which would it be?' No marvel that with such practice the young fellow was able to

talk, and astonish the homely farmers, who made the bottles and glasses clatter again as they thumped the table, and cried ‘hear, hear.’ And the end, alas! would too often be, that the well-seasoned, and far-from-sober farmer, would have to lead out his intended son-in-law, very pale and very queer, and consign him to the care of the waiter, with strict orders either to put him to bed, or see him sent safely home. And so the town and country united, and the work of life and death went on—the old church opening its doors to receive marriages and christenings, and the churchyard opening its graves to receive the dead, when the fair Marys and the young Hewerdines had grown grey, run their race, and left other sons and daughters to woo and wed, as they had done, and in time add to the generations that have passed away for ever, and now sleep their long sleep under the hoary church walls of Our Old Town.

Our dreamy, sleepy, superstitious Old Town had its fortune-teller; and many beside the ignorant country servant girls who visited the old woman when they came to market, fair, or the (stattice) statutes, paid their sixpences and shillings, for having, what they believed to be, a peep at the

future. This old impostor pretended to tell their fortunes by the cards they drew : if clubs or spades, the future husband was to be a dark-looking man ; if hearts or diamonds, he was to be fair ; and the evil was, that they believed whatever she told them. And many a foolish girl's sleep was broken through being told that her future husband would be fair, when perhaps the Johnny that 'sweethearted her' was as swarthy as a gipsy, or it might be the reverse. Sometimes from the disappointed look of the poor girl, the old hag would discover her mistake, when she would again shuffle the cards, foretel a little trouble, a great change, words with a very dear friend, and after that all would end happily. From one of the wags of Our Old Town, who went disguised as a woman, and escaped without discovery, under the promise of beoming the mother of a very large family, I learned that her prophecy run as follows : ' You'll very soon have to go a journey, and meet with pleasant company, and also a great surprise ; there's good news coming to you, and you will have a large sum of money left you by a relation you never heard of.' Then again shuffling the cards she said, ' Don't put too much con-

fidence in a fair woman that you are very intimate with, nor tell too many of your secrets to a dark one that you think you can trust; twice in your life you'll be in danger, so be careful, and always see your candle put out safely ;' then with the promise of a good husband, and living to a good old age, the old woman dismissed her customer, and told the very same tale to the next comer. The quantity of trashy chap-books which was sold in Our Old Town a quarter of a century ago, such as the 'True Fortune-Teller's Guide,' 'the Signification of Moles,' 'the Dream Guide,' 'the Whole Art of Palmistry,' &c., was truly amazing. There were but few country girls that could read, but what had amongst their secret stores one or other of these rubbishing pamphlets, and they believed every word they contained. Neither does it appear, from the number of cases that are brought from time to time before the courts of justice, that Our Old Town stands so very prominent after all, in this weak-minded folly, as fortune-tellers seem to be sprinkled all over England —a sure proof that their blinded dupes are equally plentiful, in spite of the increase of cheap literature.

It was a common custom at a wedding for the

mothers of the bride and bridegroom to throw their old shoes after the young couple, as they left their house on their way to church ; for a coach was never used at a marriage, unless the party had come from some distance. Ten or a dozen couple at a marriage-ceremony was nothing unusual ; and as they walked to church arm-in-arm, the entrance of every entry, yard, and court would be crowded with eager faces, and there was no end of shaking hands, and wishing happiness, and joking with the single couples who were wedding guests, such as 'I reckon it will be thy turn next, Sally ;' or 'What ! why I thought it had been thy wedding, Billy.' 'I'm sure if I were Susan I would get another sweetheart, thou'rt such a long time making thy mind up.' It was a pretty sight to see so many young people cleanly clad, and wearing 'posies,' passing along our old streets on their way to church, as their fathers and mothers had done before them, to stand before the same altar, and kneel on the same well-worn cushions, and there vow to cling to one another till death parted them. But they in time were borne back to the same old church to the solemn tolling of the funeral bell, when that grey old tower, from

which so many solemn knells had sounded, and so many joyous peals awakened the echoes of the surrounding hills, would throw its shadow over the dark funeral train, until it was again broken by the bright burst of bridal garments.

One little old man, a bird-fancier, who lived near the church-yard gates, never missed being present at the marriage ceremonies, and as the bridal parties had to pass his door, he formed a little arch of bird-cages over the pavement, on which his imprisoned songsters chanted the epithalamium as the wedding procession passed beneath ; and many believed that if the birds sang out right joyously, the married couple would lead a long and happy life, but if they were silent it was looked upon as an evil omen, for they believed that the love-birds, as they called them, knew all about it. He was called Pinky, from a species of linnet called pinks in the neighbourhood of Our Old Town ; and his face bore a great resemblance to a bird's, as his forehead receded, while his nose was very prominent, and the chin fell in so much that you could scarcely see it, without looking up under the large overhanging nose. He was celebrated for cutting the tongues of magpies,

jackdaws, jays, and ravens, and the boys took numbers of these birds to him, believing that when they had undergone this operation they would soon be enabled to talk. He was, also, the great oracle they went to consult when they wanted to know the sexes of the birds, for they said he could distinguish the males from the females at a glance, no matter how young they might be. He kept bulfinches, which he taught to sing the tunes that he played on his flute, while many of his birds had to work for their living, such as turning a mill before they could get at their seed, and drawing up little buckets of water before they could drink. He had large-headed owls, that seemed to sleep all day, and sharp-beaked hawks, that were always fighting, and he had, also, always on hand, a large stock of plumed peewits, which he sold to those who had gardens, for they are great destroyers of insects. Pinky had little round piercing bird-like eyes, and the boys, who had probably never heard of a wizard, said he was a witch, and could find a bird's nest wherever he liked to look for one; that they had walked two or three on each side of a hedge, in search of nests, not leaving a single branch or spray

overlooked, without finding one, and that Pinky had come up and pulled a nest out of the very same hedge in an instant. They also believed that he understood what the birds said when they sung and called to one another, and I rather think Pinky found it profitable to keep up the delusion. There was a rich twinkle of humour in his piercing eyes, as he translated the song of some bird to the little urchin in corduroys, who had come to him to hear what the birds said.

He would begin with, ' You want to know what that pretty bird's saying, do you, my little boy? Well, listen to me, for he's talking to you now, and saying "Little boy, little boy, hear, hear, hear, never take young birds and try to rear them yourself, for if you do they are sure to die, die, die, die. But buy all your birds of our friend Pinky, pink, pink, pink, and he will show you how to feed them, and then they'll live long, live long, for he is as good as a mother to us, and never gives us anything but what we like—so buy all your bird's-meat of Pinky, pink, pink, and never take little birds out of their nests till they are double penned and can peck well, peck well. But if you want young ones that

are sure to live and sing, buy them of Pinky, pink, pink, pink." Now that's what the bird has been saying, my little boy,' he would add, 'and it's very good advice indeed that he has been giving you, and if you ask the birds themselves, they'll tell you that every word of it is true.' It was true enough that the birds bought of Pinky, and fed on the food he prepared, were pretty sure to live, while nine out of every ten that the boys tried to rear themselves were as sure to die. Pinky was very attentive to his birds ; you never found him idle, he was always busy, either scraping their perches, sanding their floors, cleaning their claws, mixing their food, washing out their water-vessels, or hanging their cages with the golden-coloured groundsel, or silver-starred chickweed, which he had gathered, and which embowered their little prison-houses with roofs of refreshing green. There was not a disease that a bird is subject to, but what Pinky seemed to understand : as the boys said, ' he cured the pip like winking, and could make a bird eat its head off while moulting,' while in their hands they left off pecking, and were pretty sure to be found with their little reproachful feet turned up at the bottom of the

cage. If subject to the slightest disease, Pinky alone could make a bold stand between death and the pip. Pinky was also called, 'the early bird,' for they said he got all the worms; and it was true enough that he would be up by peep of day hunting for food for his feathered songsters, and was almost as good as a mother-bird at foraging out sustenance for his young ones. He also took a cageful into the fields, every now and then, as he said, 'To give them a little fresh air.' That he was kind to them, and that they felt his kindness, was proved by the way they fluttered about him, coming at his call, settling on him, taking food from his lips, until he really seemed as if he only wanted wings for them to nestle under to become a very bird, for they delighted to

'Hop in his walks, and gambol in his eyes.'





CHAPTER IV.

MARKET-DAY.

ONCE a week Our Old Town was aroused from its dreamy stupor by the bleating and lowing of flocks and herds, the rumble of carrier's carts and waggons, the tramp of mounted horsemen, the arrival of boats from river-side villages, and all the stir and tumult

caused by market-day. Long before daylight, excepting in the summer months, men were busy in carrying out and putting up stalls ; and solid structures many of them were, especially those used by the butchers—each strong straddling trestle of which was a load, while the stall-planks were two inches thick, and scraped every time as clean as sharp knives could make them, until they almost looked snowy white beneath the dark heavy overhanging tarry tilts. The wind might blow, and the rain beat, it could never overturn those massy trestles, nor penetrate those tar-steeped awnings. Then what meat they bore ! Not masses of fat, but lean, marbled with unctuous veins, all solid and well fed ; for there are no richer pasture-lands throughout the whole length and breadth of the velvet valleys of green and pastoral England than those which lie for miles around Our Old Town, nowhere so many cowslips as grow in those fields in hollow or on hillock—flowery mounds covering the ruins of buried abbeys and forgotten monasteries. Nearly every shop-keeper in the town had a stall in the market-place, and very fragile some of them were, so ricketty that a strong wind sometimes blew them over, to the

great delight of the mischief-loving boys if it were a sweetmeat stall, as they rushed to the rescue and helped themselves, as well as the proprietor, who received their assistance with rueful countenance. Every street, court, lane, yard, and alley sent out its stall on market-day, and the boys reaped a little harvest through helping to carry goods, fix up stalls, and take the things that were sold to the carriers. Load after load did they carry on their heads, shoulders, backs, in their arms, in their hands, for the coopers, basket-makers, harness-makers, ropers, and nearly every trade that can be mentioned, ever journeying to and fro, almost buried in the piles of things they bore ; and had you not caught a glimpse now and then of the little bright eyes that peered out from underneath the high-piled loads, you would almost have fancied that bundles of brushes, breeches, baskets, buckets, and every variety of articles were going to market to be sold of their own accord—as if they were weary of being imprisoned in the little old shops into which so few customers came. As their fond mothers said, ‘ They nearly run their little legs off for a parcel of skinflints, who never gave the bairns the value of the shoe-leather they wore away, or

enough to pay for the thread it took to mend the rags they rived.' But most of all did they like to help the 'sweetstuff' shopkeepers—for so were the confectioners called in Our Old Town—for they ate up their wages then and there on the spot, taking them out of the good things which they had carried, so that there was no disgorging, no giving up begrudgingly the hard-earned penny towards soling these boots, or buying a bit of stuff to mend this pinafore, or repair that jacket, which they would much rather have worn a little longer out at the toes or out at the elbows,, than have foregone those delicious sucks of sugared lollipops, or that clothes-besmearing banquet of sweet bull's-eyes. By the time the stalls were set out the country people came dropping in with their 'How do'st, neighbour?'—'Thou never came to look at that calf.'—'Thou must have that plough back again, and harden the coulter a bit.'—'That well-rope's beginning to fray already ; thou did'nt use the best hemp as "to" promised ;'—for so did they mingle salutations with business, as they walked or rode past ; many of the wealthy farmers with their wives behind them on the pillion, and riding double, as we see in the

mutilated effigies of the Knight Templars of old. Sometimes the burly and rosy-cheeked dame would carry the basket of eggs or butter on her knee, to save the expense of having it sent by the carrier. Or their fine bright-eyed, clear-complexioned daughters, real pictures of Saxon beauty, would come cantering by in neat-looking riding-habits, with a maund or basket strapped on the horse, which they fearlessly rode, and having given up their palfrey to the ostler, they would take their stand behind the little trestle, already placed in the butter market, and there sell the produce of their dairies, as their grandmothers had done before them.

And now the market begins in earnest ; the clamour is deafening, and, were you to sit in one of the sounding rooms of the old houses in the market-place and listen to the echoes without looking at the busy scene, you might fancy that all the dead who had ever lived in Our Old Town had come back again, and were disputing possession with the living inhabitants. Bang, bang, goes the brazier's gong—if he cannot get you to buy, he will do his best to break the drum of your ear ; the noisy potter is ringing his earthenware together, shouting at the

highest pitch of his voice, smashing something cheap every now and then to attract attention, and swearing that he will break the contents of every crate unless the people make haste to purchase. Next to him is a dealer in Sheffield hardware, doing desperate deeds at the front of his covered cart, and striking the listening rustics with speechless wonder, as they stare amazed at the number of articles—made only to sell—which he is offering for a shilling, having, as he says, ‘two hard-hearted creditors to meet on the following day, who will not wait, so have driven him to make this dreadful sacrifice.’

A blind fiddler, perched on a stool, who neither keeps time nor tune, saws away on his rosin-dusted instrument as he bawls out his ballads, while his Bardolphian-nosed wife joins in the ditty, dispenses her songs, and takes the money, giving her customers a nod instead of a ‘much obleeged,’ and continues her singing with so serious a face that you imagine hers must be a very grave business. A turkey that has escaped from its basket is ‘gobble gobbling,’ and running under the legs of the spectators, pursued by some dozen boys, whose shouting only causes the ballad-singers to screech all the louder. Fish in

every varied tone of voice is called from the edge of the pavement; while almost every description of fowl raises its voice, and joins in the deafening clamour. A runaway pig has got under a gingerbread stall, and squeals as if he were about to be murdered, as the proprietor keeps serving him with continued processes of ejection, in the form of incessant pokings from the point of an old cotton umbrella. As he decamps he overturns a cask of gingerbread nuts, and the woman rewards the boys who rush to her assistance with a quick shower of blows from the same weapon that she used in dislodging the pig. Butchers, bending beneath bulky buttocks of beef, halloo to the crowd to stand aside, as they rush past to the market beam, followed by captains and mates, who buy up whole bullocks, as provision for the lengthy voyage. Next come men carrying heavy loads of hides to be weighed, provoking curses from the crowd, whom they gore with the sharp long horns that project at every angle from the skins, causing them to be almost as much dreaded as a drove of angry oxen. Boys, with chattering magpies, noisy jays, wailing peewits, bird's eggs, young birds unfledged, half-fledged and ready to peck, add to

the uproar by their shouting ; and all the sounds mingled together make up one loud, deep, deafening hum.

Like the sound in a restless hive, the busy corn-market is all of a buzz—women get the bottoms of their dresses entangled on the long spurs of the farmers, while some unfortunate fowl, in its eagerness to pick up the fallen grain, gets pinioned under a broad-toed village-made top-boot, and if it escapes alive, makes noise enough to frighten the whole feathered community within hearing. The incessant rolling of carts causes the windows of the old houses to jar and chatter like hundreds of teeth moving together ; while the bell above the Moot-hall is ever ringing for toll collectors and hucksters to enter, or some custom or other to commence which has been kept up in Our Old Town for centuries. Then the drapers hang out their newest and most tempting patterns in long pieces that come streaming down from attic to basement out of the windows ; while bales of goods are piled up on each side the doors, and shopmen are busy with their ell-wands and scissors, giving a clip and a tear that make a whurring sound like the short sharp stroke of a

knife-grinder, as they rend off the piece they have sold, then send up the silver they have received into the air by a jerk of the thumb-nail that makes it ring again with a sound which, in their practised ears, is a test of its goodness. Where the ropers stand, and where everything in their line may be had, from a pennyworth of whipcord to a deep-plumbing well-rope, there is a smell of tar from the piles of new sheep-nets; and where the coopers congregate there is a faint marshy odour from the piles of rushes which they sell to the chair-bottomers, while the whole air around the stalls of the harness and shoe-makers is redolent of leather. Then there is a continual running from the market to the workshops, and from the workshops to the market, for this, that, and the other has been sent to be repaired in the carrier's cart, market boat, or packet, and must be done and sent back by the same conveyance, as it is wanted, for there are no coopers, tinmen, and such like to do these important repairs in the green-embowered villages, from which they have been brought.

The butter-market was the great centre of country courtship, the favourite haunt of rustic beauty; for

there the handsome farmers' daughters stood resting their butter-maunds on the neat little trestles—for the hire of which they paid a penny—in riding-hats, veils, and riding-habits, many of them heiresses to goodly acres—for hundreds of green homesteads, with their richly-cultivated fields that were their father's freeholds, stretched for miles over hill and valley among the villages that lay around Our Old Town. There they stood ranged in rows, laughing and gossiping with each other, or looking down abashed when the wealthy farmer's sons, whose homes perhaps lay miles away from where they lived, came to whisper a few fond words, and renew those vows which they could only breathe once a week to these 'neat-handed Phyllises,' on account of the distance that intervened between the far-off farms. The butter-market was to the country what the old staithes were to the town, the spot where rural lovers 'most did congregate.' And there appointments would be made for meeting on Sundays; invitations given to rustic feasts and old-fashioned merrymakings; and there the maiden often took the last farewell of her lover before she bore the sacred name of wife; for when he met her again, it would

be to lead her forth as his bride to the homely altar of the humble village church. There, too, might be seen the ladies of Our Old Town, followed by their clean and tidy servant girls, with market-baskets, tasting and cheapening the sweet butter which the village beauties had assisted to make, and inquiring after the health of their families—for some of the elderly ladies had dealt with their mothers when they were pretty country maidens, and stood behind their butter-maunds in the market many long years ago, but now seldom left their easy chairs by the comfortable farm-house hearth to journey so far as Our Old Town. They brought their butter to market wrapped in sweet green leaves, to prevent one pound adhering to another, generally preferring those of the black currant when they were in season; they shaped it in fanciful wooden moulds, which embossed the golden-coloured butter with bees, birds, and flowers, conjuring up while you ate it visions of those 'green nestling spots' in which it had been made, while the napkins which covered it were white as moonlit snow. Eggs, curds, whey, honey, new milk, and cream-made-cheese, were used in the making of such cheese-cakes and custards as

were only to be found in the neighbourhood of our cowslip-bordered Old Town. Shade of aunt Susan ! never more shall we taste such delicious syllabubs, when 'the dog-star rages,' as thou—and thy sun-tanned lasses—were wont to make ; the secret of preparing the ambrosia quaffed by the Olympian gods of old, was lost for ever when thou didst decease. Nor did these industrious daughters spend the whole produce of their dairies at the drapers ; but you might see them purchasing the spinning-wheels, which were drawn up in a row by the turner's stall, the neat 'upright' made of mahogany, and which was often used in the parlour, where it stood like a plumed sentinel, with its 'rock' covered with the finest flax. And a pretty picture it was to see a handsome country maiden seated at her spinning-wheel, her neat nimble foot working the little treddle, as the finely-spun line passed through her fingers—her bare rounded arms seen to as much advantage as if she had been twanging idle ditties, while seated in a carefully-studied attitude before a sounding harp. It may be that I stand alone in my regret, and mourn over the loss of those good old habits of industry—that I loved to see the pretty

maiden at her wheel, the country weaver at his loom, and the enduring web which she had spun and he had woven lying, like a white cloud, upon the green grass by the village brook where it was spread out to bleach—better than I do seeing them set up for fine ladies, calling their fathers and mothers ma's and pa's, and voting the jug of home-brewed ale and the old-fashioned comfortable pipe as vulgar. I dislike that artificial refinement which uproots home-bred happiness, those coldly-polite receptions which stand in the place of the old warm welcomes—looked more than said—that greeted us as we crossed the friendly threshold. I like better the rustic bloom that was ever changing from red to white, than the conventional delicacy that has lost its blush—that nameless something that without effort pleased far more than the charming accomplishments which are made up to wear, every now and then, like holiday garments. I wish not back those riotous scenes, and boisterous days, which Our Old Town has witnessed, when corn sold for five pounds a quarter, and the farmers paid less for the land than they do now—when the tavern bells were never still, and wine flowed like water at those old

market dinners, of which a few surviving hosts still tell, exclaiming with a sigh, as they shake their sad grey hairs, ‘There will never be such days again. Where this horse was found riderless, and that rider was picked up speechless, often formed matter of merriment at those drunken market-day dinners among the farmers who were fortunate enough not to have broken their necks during their midnight rides out of Our Old Town. All agriculture had to do with chemistry in these rude flourishing days extended to drench, bolus, and salve for the sheep ; high-farming and liquid manure were never thought of. They laid soil on their fields in unbroken lumps, threw bones on by the load without breaking them, and now and then scattered soot over their lands in loose handfuls, which was all blown away the next hour, saving what adhered to themselves, and left them blacker than the sweeps they had bought it of.

Beside the shopkeepers, market-day was looked for eagerly by many who came as apprentices and servants from the neighbouring hamlets to Our Old Town. Bill, who had come to learn butchering, knew that in the bundle containing his clean

linen—which his mother left weekly—there would be some sweet home-made luxury, such as his master's table did not furnish.

It was pleasant to witness the affectionate salutes and friendly interviews that took place among relatives on a market-day, at shop-doors and entries, and by old inn-yards; to see the very young sorrowing for the cottage home and requiring to be comforted; tears on the cheeks telling that the lesson of life had begun, and that those were the first sad letterings in which it was written; the close workshop exchanged for the regretted game on the breezy common, and a hundred other regrets—heavy troubles to home-sick hearts which have never before been touched by the cold piercing iron of the hard world. Betsy cannot have all the comforts of her old country-home about her while she is learning bonnet-making; and she stands pouring a long list of troubles into her dear mother's ears, the heaviest of which, if remembered in after-life, will only awaken a smile; though now from her deep sobbing they seem to be quite heart-breaking. Even sturdy Joe, who has just been apprenticed to joinering, as he stands with the

bundle under his arm, which his mother has carried seven long miles, shakes his chubby head as if there was something or another that he is resolved not to put up with. Poor fellow! perhaps on Saturday nights they make him clean the shoes and knives, and he is making his fond mother's heart ache by threatening to rebel—by proclaiming war against the knife-board, and abjuring boots, blacking, and brushes, unless they are ratified by his indenture.

And many a poor mother, like Joe's, brings the produce of her little garden from as great a distance to market, that she may have the pleasure of meeting such of her children as are employed in Our Old Town, and carry back such necessaries as are needed for those who are still at home. Though it may be only a basket of green gooseberries in the spring, followed by other fruit as the summer season advances, yet it costs her but little more than the labour of carrying it; and she has only to set her basket down in the vegetable market, under the archway of the old Moot-hall, and there her customers will find her; and the toll-collector will be very merciful when he comes round followed by

his man who carries the toll-dorser (hamper), and take but a handful of berries or a couple of apples, or some half-dozen plums, and so on, as he passes from one to another—for no heavier tolls are taken of the country people, unless they hire stalls or trestles in Our Old Town.

Those who have no gardens, often gather herbs and bring them to market; and to a lover of botany it is as great a treat as turning over the pages of quaint old Gerarde's Herbal, to examine their baskets and listen to their conversation. Agrimony, betony, camomile, dandelion, eyebright, frog-grass, ground-ivy, and every herb beginning with every other letter of the alphabet, might there be found; and if you have but patience to listen, those old-fashioned, simple-hearted, and all-believing country people will tell you of the wondrous cures that have been effected by different kinds of herbs. How this is good for a green wound, and that for an obstinate rheumatism; how one was gathered by moonlight; another, while the dew lay on the ground; a third, in the dry sunshine, or on St. Somebody's day; believing with homely Tusser in his 'Hundrede Pointes of Goode Husbandrie,' that 'thereby lies a

thing,' and that the healing virtues of the herbs are lost unless when gathered in these old-world seasons. You hear how 'Doctor this and that attended old Hannah for so many years, and did her no good—how she had no appetite, and how poor her blood was, until she began to take horehound ; after which she was able to eat nearly the whole brown loaf at breakfast, and a good cut out of the fat flitch for dinner.' 'Bless you, Sir!' they will perhaps add, 'the sun never shone on a finer and a better herb—and only a penny a bunch.'

Some of these old village dames who have large families, sons and daughters perhaps married, or out at service in the country, come to market with as many commissions as a commercial traveller, who takes orders for a dozen wholesale houses. She has a pocketful of fragments to match ; half-knitted stockings that require more worsted ; part of a dress that wants 'another breadth ;' a little more ribbon to complete the trimming of a bonnet ; a bit of stuff 'same pattern ' to patch Sally's gown ; something to return that would'nt wash, the colours run so ; a new blade to Jack's knife ; Polly's scissors to get ground ; Etty's earrings to be repaired ; a Bible for her godson

Bill, whom farmer Furze has taken on trial ; beside two or three poor neighbours' groceries to purchase ; and all of which she will carry back in the basket that she places on the 'roll' on the top of her head. 'The respects' she has to carry back in her head, are as numerous as the articles she carries on it, yet she rarely forgets anything—though 'that druggist is always giving her some wrong stuff or another, and she wonders why his things isn't called by more natural names.'

Beside the bustle in the market-place, the inn-yards are filled with carriers' carts and waggons ; the inn-stables with horses ; the staithes and wharves crowded with goods for the market-boats and packets that are moored beside them ; and in all these you will see great fat-faced country fellows sitting, receiving goods or cutting with their clasp-knives the 'hunches' of bread, bacon, and cheese they have brought with them from the neighbouring villages. About two miles an hour was the rate at which these old-fashioned vehicles travelled to the market of Our Old Town, and as many of the country people came ten or a dozen miles, they were compelled to start very early ; and as the fresh air on river and road

increased their good appetites, you marvelled not at their consuming such quantities of food.

Neither the paddle-wheel of a steamer, nor the shrill scream of a railway whistle, had dimpled the river or startled the silence that reigned over the scenery around Our Old Town at the time of which I am writing. As it then was, so it had no doubt been throughout a long century, without any perceptible change; and you could see that here and there the shadows of remoter centuries still fell across it, and left patches of that deep twilight through which our forefathers saw darkly.

Many of the little shopkeepers 'depended' on market-day, and often took more money then, at their stalls, than they did during the whole week in their shops. When you looked in at their windows and glanced at their stock in trade, it quite puzzled you to make it out how they were able to get a living at all. In some of them, all you could see were a few sweetmeats in glasses, a dozen or two of apples or oranges, two or three handfuls of nuts, half a dozen whip and pegging tops, about as many battledores and shuttlecocks, a row or two of pins and pearl buttons, a few children's balls, and cotton

balls, a suspicious pic or two, which not being sold on market-day was never likely to meet with a customer, unless offered to some hungry urchin at half-price—and these were all; saving at spring, when a bundle or two of radishes and young onions stood in water in an earthenware vessel at the door; those had been taken in exchange for something or another of some poor countrywoman on market-day, and ten to one the shopkeeper would have to eat them, when they were no longer saleable. You went inside: a few candles dangled over your head; two small canisters contained tea and coffee; you guessed that there was an ounce or two of tobacco in the tiny jar, through seeing the couple of crossed pipes that made quite a show in the window; the salt and sugar were in drawers under the very small counter—there was only one pair of scales to weigh everything. You became curious, and sat at your window opposite for hours together: after watching a very long time you saw a child go in, while another waited outside—they had held a long consultation together before venturing on a purchase—it came out, bit a piece of something off and put it in the other's mouth, then they vanished up an adjoining passage.

They had spent the farthing their mother had given them, in 'goody.' Onions and radishes frequently handled but not purchased. After long higgling, two boys carry off a pie, which the shopkeeper cuts in two ; the syrup spilt on the counter, is not wasted, a stoop of the head and a quick motion of the tongue, and it is gone. You can see from the looks of the non-licker, that he hardly thinks that fair, and that he is trying hard to persuade the other boy to pour him back a little syrup into his half of the half-priced pie. Towards dark a poor woman comes out with a candle in her hand and a few things in her apron ; you see the shopkeeper take up a slate—those goods are to be paid for on Saturday night ; there is a long lingering look at the slate after she is gone. Just before the shop closes another customer comes, and after being served, has to wait until the proprietor goes out to get change for a shilling—onions and radishes shown to the last customer for that day, but rejected with a very quick shake of the head. After that the shutters are put to, the solitary tallow-candle that has long been guttering over the remaining pie is extinguished, and the establishment closed. Ten minutes after, you see a light at the chamber-window, then all is dark.

One pound sterling would buy the whole stock of many a little shop in Our Old Town, excepting on the morning of market-day or at fair-time ; for the groceries are fetched in very small quantities at a time from the larger shops 'up-town,' to which most of the people go once a week who pay ready money for 'their things,' as they call them. But on market-day throughout the fruit season, they sold dozens of pies to the country people, who were too economical to take refreshment at the inns ; and in winter they made stone weights of something, out of almonds, treacle, and ginger, which, if not very palatable was 'hot-i-th'-mouth.' A busy day was it at that large old gingerbread shop, which supplied the little village stores wholesale for miles around. What forgotten artist fashioned those moulds in which brown kings and queens were baked ? those hotly-spiced alphabets which were their own reward ? —the little pupil being allowed to eat his letters as fast as he learnt them : there is no such temptation for mastering crooked S and round O, now ! no such digestible books as we really devoured in our younger days. Beautiful was that baked lady with the fan, with two currants for eyes, and the gilded gentleman with his hat off taking her by the hand ;

some Vauxhall Simpson must have stood for that model—have been fashioned from that mould. What sacks of flour, ‘races’ of ginger, and casks of treacle were used up in that gingerbread shop ! Brimstone, it was also rumoured, was worked up in any quantity for private orders, and given to little pets, who though objecting to take it in raw treacle, swallowed it eagerly in the form of baked windmills, horses, elephants, and such other extinct forms as Owen never dreamed of in his wildest visions of fossil restorations. Like apples of the Dead Sea, there were also tempting and tasty worm-cakes, which made the little dears feel very queer indeed, after indulging somewhat freely in the deceiving luxuries, and as they got older they looked upon the proprietor of the large gingerbread-shop as a conspirator.

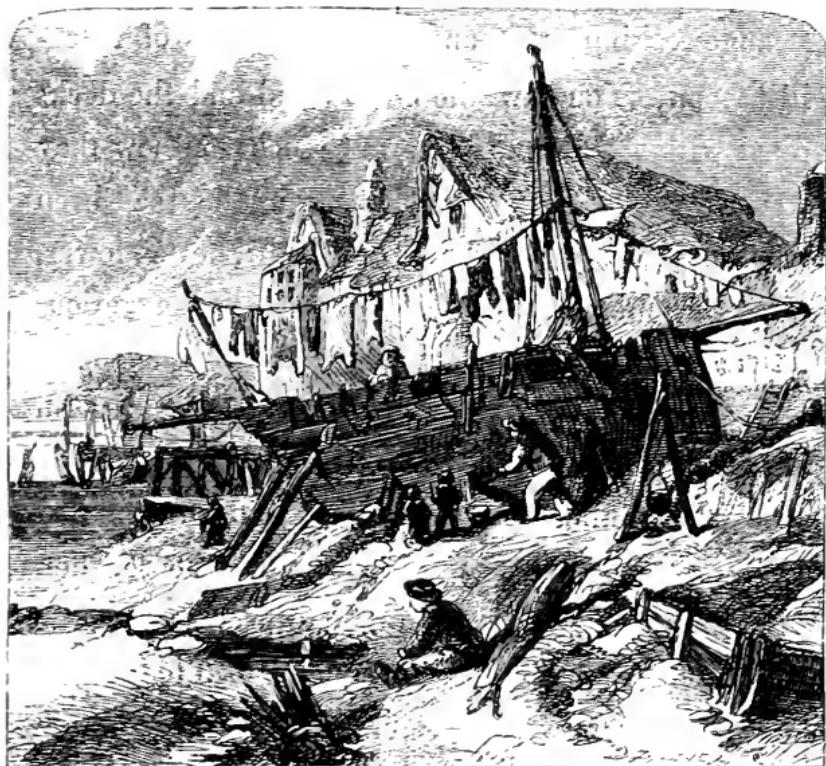
As statutes for the hiring of servants were held in almost every village in the hundred, the rustics after receiving their ‘fasten-penny,’ which was as binding as the recruiting-serjeant’s shilling, generally came to spend it on market-day in Our Old Town, where statutes were also held at certain seasons of the year. Then the real Johnnys and Mollys appeared ; such as, excepting on these occasions, spent

their whole lives in remote granges, solitary farm-houses, and secluded thorps and hamlets (often consisting of only some half-dozen houses), bringing with them the heavy ploughman's ungainly gait, and the red dairymaid's ungraceful waddle. But amongst them some over-dressed village belle would now and then appear, and have to pay the blush of shame as a penalty for her pride—as some plain, well-to-do farmer's wife in quest of a servant, instead of hiring her would say, ‘I'm afraid, my lass, thou art a good deal too fine for me, and would be above brewing, baking, washing, milking, churning, and feeding the fowls and pigs. Thou looks in thy fine fal-the-rals, more fit to be my mistress and give me a fasten-penny than I do to be thine.’ And off the plain-speaking, wealthy old dame would trudge, after having, as she would say, ‘read pride a bit of a lesson,’ to search for some servant whose attire was more to her fancy. Then the farm servants would get into the public-houses, and after they had had a few ‘gills o’ ale,’ begin to boast how much they had ploughed, sowed, reaped, and mowed in a day; and the young men of Our Old Town, to aggravate them, would offer bets that they could find somebody who

should 'beat them into fits.' Then there would be a row and a fight, town against country, and the constable would have to interfere, and after the war was over summonses would be taken out, and when 'Justice day' came the Old Moot hall would be crowded, and Our Old Town once more in a tumult. And after such a terrible break-out, instead of only the usual old justice of the peace coming riding into the town, on his slow-moving, head-drooping nag, there would be another 'justice,' and the Moot-hall would be besieged; while the entrance of every yard, alley, entry, 'twitchell,' and passage, would be crowded with men, women, and children, waiting to see those great dignitaries pass. What this one said to the charge made by the constable, and that one replied to the remarks made by the justice, would be the talk of the whole place for weeks after, together with the fines that were paid and the sureties they had to find to keep the peace. And mighty men did they become all at once in their own estimation who were compelled to provide bail; and it made you almost tremble to look at them after, if they were insulted, when they said, 'You daren't have said that, if I hadn't been bound in a five-pound

bond to keep the peace.' That retort was more effective than any blow, for you felt that a man who was so powerful that he had to be bound down by the law, could have carried off easily, like another Samson, the gates of Our Old Town, if he had chosen.





CHAPTER V.

OLD WAREHOUSES, SHIPS, WATER-SIDE CHARACTERS, AND THE OLD WATERWORKS.

THERE was always something to be found by the wharves, in the warehouses, and along the river-side, to amuse, instruct, and meditate upon ; something odd in the forms of the old-fashioned vessels, in the characters who had the management of many a

strange-looking craft, and in the method of laden-
ing them. You saw the holds filled and the decks
piled with goods, and it never struck you how they
were stowed there, or by what means they had been
moved, until you looked at the men lift, heave, lower,
throw, catch, carry, and stow away all the various
articles of merchandize, which were ever passing to
and from Our Old Town. Huge cheeses, that an
unpractised hand could but barely have lifted, were
by some peculiar swing taken up and thrown and
caught, first from the man in the warehouse, then
from him who stood on the plank that spanned the
water, he again threw the ponderous load to the man
on the deck of the vessel, and when heaved from the
hands of the latter it vanished in the hold, and I
never remember an instance of one falling into the
river. Rough and heavy lumps of what in Our Old
Town was called plaster (gypsum) were thrown and
caught with apparent ease in the same way ; while,
if a man much stronger than those who were prac-
tised in this peculiar labour had only taken 'a spell'
for a few minutes, instead of following it up hour by
hour, as they did, he would have cut his hands,
jarred the muscles of his arms, and felt as if his

shoulders had been dislocated. Then there were long rods and bars of iron, which could only be got into the ships' holds by raising them to exact angles and lowering them to a nicety of measurement; and which when attained they seemed like things of life to slide down of their own accord and take their rest, falling with a sound that made all around ring again. Clean, dry, golden-coloured wheat, ready for the mill, came rattling out of the floors of lofty warehouses, down long wooden spouts into the vessels, enveloping the men in the deep holds—who regardless of the clatter kept shovelling away—in clouds of grain. Huge cranes, as if poised in the air, and hovering for prey, came slowly swinging out of the top-most floors of these tall buildings, then hanging over the ships for a few seconds, their iron talons came rattling down, and pouncing upon sugar hogsheads, rum-puncheons, and pipes of wine, again soared into the air with their heavy prey, as easily as a falcon carries off a sparrow, and retired with it beyond those lofty doors, as if there to devour it at leisure. Bales of wool and pockets of hops they carried up as if they were but mere feathers with which to line their hidden nests; while enormous pieces of timber

which had lain ‘floating many a rood,’ they bore off in their iron claws as nimbly as crows carry away sticks at building-time.

‘Cuckoos’ high, long, and narrow, that drew but two or three feet of water, and which were built to navigate the creeks, dykes, and canals that branched off every few miles from the river, were moored beside Our Old Town ; and in your walks you sometimes saw them moving lazily along through marsh and meadow, by woods, and the side of sweet green villages, or wherever the water-courses wound between their flowery embankments that led to pot-making, coal-digging, and mining countries far inland. ‘Catches,’ broad, strong, and shallow, and without decks, excepting over the little cabin at the stern, and there not deep enough to reach up to the steersman’s hips when he stood on the floor guiding the ungainly rudder, were ever coming and going from ‘above bridge,’ through miles of the richest pastoral scenery in merry England. Nor were there any finer horses in the country than those used for hauling these ‘catches’—none that measured so much from the chest to the shoulder or that could drag so many hours without halting. And when the wind

or tide were favourable, and the boats needed no hauling, these strong horses would be taken on board, and there they would stand feeding under the shadow of the broad brown sail, quite as much at their ease as if in their own stables.

It was a pretty picture, at some bending of the river that wound round the foot of a green hill like a band of silver, to see the sunshine gilding the sail, and falling on the horses in the boat, as it glided along beneath the overhanging foliage, amid which the white smoke from the low cabin chimney arose, until lost in another turning, or dissolved in the sunny distance. Then there were brigs and sloops, keels and billy-boys, smacks and frigates, market-boats, ferry-boats, and packets, with every other description of craft that did not draw above twelve feet water, for if their draught exceeded that depth, they were likely enough to get aground—excepting when there were very high tides—on the shoals, and flats, ‘stubbs,’ and ‘snags,’ that lay like hidden snares between the mouth of the river and Our Old Town. Some of these lay at anchor, while others were secured to huge iron rings or ponderous piles, that looked like the black and bleached ribs of the old wharves

and warehouses from which they projected. And on the little decks of many of these tiny vessels, children played, while their mothers washed, and mended and cooked ; running about under the clothes that were hung to dry in the rigging. Sometimes you saw these industrious and hardy women steering the boat, and nursing an infant at the same time, as their mothers had done before them, for many of them had never had any other homes than the vessels in which they were born, and which they navigated and lived in until they grew grey or were incapable of labour. As these vessels were generally their own, it will be readily imagined that they were worked and kept afloat whatever the planks could be kept together, and never were such pitched, and patched, and clumsily cobbled craft seen, as some of those which had been the homes of long generations, and built so far back that they were old when owned by the grandfathers of the present possessors. It was rumoured that some had gone through so many repairs, that scarcely a foot of the original timber that was first launched, remained. Now and then one would sink, go down, 'and make no sign,' and as she was so old and crazy that she would have

dropped to bits if any attempt had been made to raise her, she was generally left to fill with mud and strengthen the shore by which she sank, until she broke up, or the tide washed her away. The owner, who had lived on board her all his life, and who had a large family, perhaps, was generally too poor to purchase another vessel, so he took a berth, and did the best he could ; happy enough if he could be made master, and transfer his whole kith and kin to his new ship. Occasionally some rotten plank would spring in the night, when all were aboard and sound asleep, and all that would be seen on the following morning would be the mast and rigging, through which the sunny ripples flowed, above the unconscious dead. One of these little craft I well remember—she was called the ‘Willing Mind,’ and belonged to a good and pious, but very poor man, who, in his little cabin in winter, and on deck in summer, offered up his morning and evening prayers, with all his large family kneeling around him ; and pleasant music did the voices of his little children make, as they joined in the holy hymn, the sound of which rose sweetly through the open hatchway, when the simple service was performed below. So shallow

was his little cabin, that he could only sit upright at the entrance, and then his good grey head was above the level of the deck, so that when he read the Bible, he had to stoop to be heard, and if it were a long chapter, he was forced to pause every now and then to ease his poor aching back. As for his wife, who was rather stout, she only used to pop her head up occasionally, as if to get a breath of air, then dive down again instantly ; sometimes she would lie down on her side, and breathe through a porthole, when the vessel was light, for when laden this little luxury was below the water-line. This poor man was always at work, under his vessel when she lay high and dry, doing some repairs or another, and when the tide rose, he was equally busy above. Pitch, oakum, and hammer, the old wood too rotten to support the new. ‘ You will knock her to bits, Benny,’ the lookers-on would exclaim ; ‘ you are stopping up one hole and making two, she’ll not last much longer ;’ then the pious owner would say, ‘ She’ll last as long as it pleaseth Him to let her hold together, and He who giveth and taketh away, doeth all things for the best,’ and he would raise his hat reverentially, as he spoke. Greatly as the poor man

was respected, she became so bad at last, that no one dare trust him with a cargo. Bricks they said would drive her bottom out, and lime burn her up through the leakage, which would 'slack' it; as for corn it sprouted before he reached the end of his voyage, and potatoes made long shoots, he had to 'lay-by' so many times to pitch, oakum, and hammer. At length the end came one calm summer evening, when Benny, who had been entrusted with a cargo of gravel, was hauling like a horse on the banks of the smooth canal, with the rope fixed over his right shoulder, and under his left arm, and humming the 'Old Hundredth Psalm,' whenever he had a mouthful of breath to spare, his portly wife, as usual, stood half in and half out of the shallow cabin, steering, while the children were seated on the little morsel of deck around the chimney, the water, meantime, gradually rising around her feet. 'It's up to my ankles, Benny,' she at last shouted; 'and over the two bricks I put down to stand on.' Benny ceased his pious chanting, and exclaimed, 'The Lord's will be done, my dear, but if she will but keep afloat until I can draw her up to where the embankment's given way, she will, with His blessing, become useful at

last.' He drew her up to the bank, as he spoke, and having got his wife and children, and his few goods and chattels ashore, he once more placed the hauling-line over his shoulder, and his wife helping him, they pulled with might and main, for they could see that she was filling fast. At length, the poor old 'Willing Mind,' reached the gap in the embankment —she seemed made to fit it, and he had scarcely time to get her, in what he considered, the most serviceable position, when she slowly settled down, never to rise again. That night Benny's evening hymn, and family prayer were offered up just as if nothing had happened ; and surrounded by his few goods, and his wife and children, he prepared their beds by the side of the canal, and there they slept as soundly under that calm sweet July midnight, with the moon and stars looking down upon them, as if they had been pillow'd in down, and sheltered under the roof of a palace. The proprietors of the canal paid for the gravel, and gave Benny a few pounds for the wreck of his vessel, which he received thankfully, and said 'She was turned into a good purpose at last, and everything that was made was intended for a good end.' And through the assistance of

kind friends he soon obtained another vessel, which he christened 'The New Willing Mind.'

It was a happy day for Benny, when the first 'Bethel,' or floating chapel, was opened on the river ; when the flag of peace with its white star fluttered out one sunny Sunday above the hull of the 'Old Nancy.' Sweet was his smile, and glad was his heart, as he went from one to another, and shook the tarry hands of those who had jeered and mocked him, uttering wicked oaths, and roaring out profane songs, when moored beside him, to drown the sound of the holy hymns, and pious prayers he offered up. Happy was his heart when he knelt beneath that peaceful star, to pray in the midst of his old enemies, and saw the tears of penitence trickle down their storm-furrowed and sun-brownèd cheeks. Many in Our Old Town, who then witnessed that pleasing sight, have long since moored their weary barks in the quiet haven of eternity. And amongst them the good and pious Benny has dropped the anchor of his faith and hope, in that calm sea of death. Beside him sleeps his convert, old Abraham, whose face when living was seamed with scars : many in Our Old Town remembered when he was at the head

of the Press-gang, while Nelson commanded the British fleet. It was rumoured that, in his day, old Abraham had pressed and sent off more sailors to the tender, than any other man in England. Many a tale was told of his hair-breadth escapes, in those perilous times ; and the roofless and ruined house in Our Old Town was often pointed out, in which he was left for dead, when the assembled sailors rushed to the rescue of their companions, and on that terrible night, released all within it who had been pressed. That ruined house is still pointed out as the 'Old Rendezvous,' and in the twilight hour, before the candles are lighted, while the flickering blaze of the fire alternately gilds the hearth then leaves it in its gloom, and ever-changing lights and shadows play on the walls, strange tales are told of gashed and mangled bodies having been found in the garden of that ruined house, beneath the rank weeds with which it is overgrown ; and those who pass it after dark, hurry by with 'bated breath.'

'It was a merry spot in days of yore,
But something ails it now—the place is cursed.'

And he, whose voice was rough as the tempest,

who had mingled in many of the murderous scenes which made the memory of the place accursed, now lies by the side of pious Benny, in our old peaceful churchyard, in accordance with his last wish and prayer; for Abraham lived long enough to bless the day when he was persuaded by the owner of the ‘Willing Mind’ to enter the hold of the floating Bethel, join in the hymn which he gave out, and kneel to the earnest prayer which good Benny offered up. Near to where they sleep—though he died some years before they ‘reached the boundary of their utmost sail’—lies another of the worthies of Our Old Town, who, as a sailmaker’s apprentice, went round the world with Captain Cook. Many an eager listener was wont to gather around him, as he sat on his accustomed form on the sunny side of the gossiping-staith, his hair silver-white, recounting his wild adventures by sea and land, and telling how those looked, and talked, and acted, whom we now read about with wonder. His memory was a goodly book filled with store of strange knowledge, which when he died was lost to us for ever. He belonged to a generation that has passed away, and was familiar with old ships and old seamen, whose

names are now only to be found in the pages of naval history, many of them ‘buried deeper than ever plummet sounded.’

In the same churchyard sleeps the old smuggler, whose daring deeds, half a century ago, were the talk of the whole country-side : a dangerous sand, a little way seaward from the mouth of the river that flows up to Our Old Town, still bears his name. He too used to sit on the sunny staithc, and tell how he daringly steered over that perilous sand, when pursued by the revenue cutter ; and how she perished with all hands, while he escaped with his contraband cargo. As he had lived, so he died, defying death to the last : when they brought the good old clergyman to visit him, in his last illness, he sprung out of the hammock in which he always slept, took up a rusty cutlass, and vowed what he would do unless they left him alone. After that he barred and bolted his door and windows ; and the next morning was found dead. In the night he had drawn the tattered flag of the smuggler he once commanded, from some secret recess, and covered himself with it, for he had many a time sworn that he would die under his old flag. You could not look at him, even in his old age,

without recalling those daring sea-kings whose deeds, centuries ago, spread terror along our coast. He was often heard to boast that he never felt the feeling of fear ; and those who knew him well, believed him. In his younger years, men turned to look after him in wonder, and spoke of his deeds in whispers : tales were told of the old magistrate, who once committed him to prison, having been carried out of his house at midnight, and kept for days in the dark hold of a vessel, then landed again in the darkness, on the wild sea-coast, many a long league from his home ; but who captured him, or by what vessel he was borne away, he never knew. After that, however, no constable could be found to serve a summons—nor any magistrate to commit—either the old smuggler or any of his crew ; for his vessel was looked upon with dread and terror, whenever it came up and lay moored in the river beside Our Old Town.

River-side Jack was another of good old Benny's converts, and became a regular attendant at the Bethel. Jack, 'who was every inch a sailor,' was compelled, through peculiar circumstances, to become cow-keeper ; and never before was there such a salt-

sea savour thrown around pastoral life, as he contrived to season it with. When the weather was at all squally, he put on his old nor'-wester and rough pea-jacket, to fetch up his cows at milking-time ; and when he drove them back again from the cow-house to the field, he would say 'they've plenty of sea-room now to tack about in.' If customers came for milk before it was ready, he would tell them that he should 'begin to bale out' at some given number of bells; and when all the milk was sold, he said that they 'had cleared out and stowed away.' If his cows were any distance off, when he went to fetch them up, he put his hand to his mouth, and hallooed out 'Cows ahoy !' and if they loitered on the road, threatened to give them 'the rope's end ;' or if they travelled out of their direct course, he would call to them as if boxing the compass, with a 'Now, Bessy, nor' by west, old girl.' When the road was dry and clean, 'there was good steerage for the cows ;' when heavy and muddy, they had 'a dirty look-out ahead.' He used to boast that his milk was 'no three-quarter grog :' and, as a kind of compromise between sea and land, he took rum and milk for breakfast. No one ever thought of asking him how he did ; but

inquired what quarter the wind was in, and if it were likely to change. Every leisure moment he had, he spent on the wharves ; his seat generally was the top of a mooring-pile, with his feet hanging over the water, where he hailed every ship that came in or went out. He would sooner take a boat, and row half a mile to serve some captain's wife with a pennyworth of milk, than sit at his ease and 'bale out' a whole shilling's-worth at home. Jack promised his dear old mother on her death-bed, that he would stay at home, and help his sister to look after the cows, and as she wished it, never go to sea again ; and he never once broke his word.

There was one long row of little low houses, principally occupied by those who were employed at the water-side wharves, in warehouses, and at the ship-yard, to which access could only be obtained by going a long way up the street, and then making a great bend round, under the archway of a large, old pillared house—the history of which house was the greatest mystery of Our Old Town—unless you went through an old inn-yard, where there was no right of thoroughfare, and over a broad deep ditch, which was crossed by a plank. By the latter road, the

row of houses lay but little more than a stone-cast from the main-street that fronted the river ; by the former way they could only be reached by those coming from 'up-town' going a long mile round, and coming in by the 'back-way ;' for the whole length of the town, from the foot of the hills, had only been pierced in three places, and all the little courts, yards, entrys, alleys, 'twitchells,' and passages, were but veins, branching from these three great arteries. Now the innkeeper, by some means or another, found that while the inhabitants of these houses made use of his yard, his plank, and his right-of-way, they fetched their ale and beer from other public-houses, instead of dealing with him ; and on this hint he spake, and said, 'No ale, no plank—no beer, no thoroughfare ; if you deal with others, you shall go a mile round to fetch your liquor : if my brewing is worse than theirs, consider what time you save—what you lose in quality, you more than gain otherwise.' So matters went on for a little time, and they divided their custom, giving him a turn every now and then, until the Ship Inn chanced to have some very superior ale and beer, when they deserted him. Then he up with the plank, and bidding defi-

ance to the whole populace of this little back-street, like Coriolanus, 'banished them.' Though he did not close the gates of his inn-yard, yet there lay the impassable gulf between.

What an assembly of wives and children, with jugs and cans was there that day on one side of the ditch, and of husbands and sons who worked at the water-side on the other, and who had come to dinner but could not get across, so were compelled to return and go all the way round. The allotted dinner hour was nearly taken up in walking from and to their work. 'They would have the law on him, that they would, and he should be made to smart for it. They would put a plank of their own across, and at his peril let him touch it, that was all.' The tall brown broad-chested landlord, who feared no living man single-handed, and who had many a time, without any assistance, bundled out a whole tap-room full of drunken and noisy customers, said, 'They might lay fifty planks across the ditch if they liked—there was nothing to hinder them, so long as they kept on their own side; but the first who set foot in his inn-yard, without his permission, if he were a man, he would either throw him into

the ditch, or be thrown in himself. There was no right-of-way, through his private property, and he should keep the inn-yard gates locked, so they might have the law of him as soon as they liked.' This, as they said, 'was a pretty fix to be placed in,' for if he locked up the inn-yard, the road over the ditch led to nowhere but his back-door. They endured the privation for a few days, and when Saturday night came, a few of them went in to have 'their gill or two of ale, and reason with him a bit,' and as it was scarcely a minute's work to replace the plank, they went home that night by the old accustomed path, the landlord holding the lantern to light them across, and both parties declaring, with many a shake of the hand, that neither of them meant any harm. Nor were the women sorry when peace was restored; for during the few nights the plank was up, it was rather late before their husbands reached home, and, as they said, 'they could not hunt them up so readily, having such a long way to go round,' while the men said, 'it was the going round made them so late.'

So there was a picture restored which I had many a time looked upon with pleasure, as I watched

the men returning to their meals, with a few chips under their arms, or wood they had picked out of the river, for the fire, while the children ran to meet them ; and the youngest they would carry in the one arm that was disengaged, leaving the others to take hold of the corners of their aprons, and so altogether come smiling and happy to their humble home. Their fond mothers would often stand watching them, until they caught sight of their husbands in the distance, when they would leave the dear little things to 'toddle' along the foot pavement by themselves to reach their father, while they themselves hurried back to take up the dinner, and have it ready smoking on the table by the time his footstep crossed the threshold. Such punctuality gave the husband time to go to the old staith steps for a pail or two of water before he returned, and to lend a helping hand in many another household matter—all the more cheerfully through not having had to wait for his dinner—such as taking the children for a few minutes to the river-side, and showing them the water, and the shipping, or into the green fields that came up to the very doors behind the streets of Our Old Town, while the wife

washed up the dinner things, and tidied up the hearth. And these little duties gladly done, brought pleasant sleep to their pillows at night, and strewed the path of life with the odour of those invisible roses, which loving hearts and willing feet tread upon unawares, and which throw their sweetness over many a poor but happy home. They are never noticed by those who look only at the mountain top in the far distance, but have no eye for the busy bee shaking the fragance of the wild thyme from its musical wings, as it murmurs among the pretty wild flowers that cover the little hillock at their feet.

By the river-side stood the old water-works. A stranger in passing that dark, wet, steep, slippery entry, might have paused for a moment to have wondered what it was that made such a low rumbling creaking sound. Had he gone a yard or two down, and peeped into the dim low doorway under the vaulted passage, he would have seen through the half-darkened cellar-like light, a poor weary horse going round and round, turning a large strong horizontal wooden wheel, on which some young urchin would be seated with a whip in his hand, quite enjoying the ride. From the pursing up of

the little driver's lips, the looker-on would rightly conclude that he was whistling, though not a note could be heard, for the groaning and moaning, and shaking and quaking of the old heavy machinery. That was the old water-house, and those the water-works, that had supplied a portion of Our Old Town with water for nearly three centuries, though they had stopped hundreds of times to undergo repairs, and been stopped no one knew how often through different lawsuits, which never were, nor never will be thoroughly settled. A fourth of the weight of timber would far better have answered every purpose, for which those great lumbering pieces of oak had been put together. Those water-works were first erected by an enterprising Dutchman in the reign of Elizabeth, and seem to move just as heavily now, as they must have done when first built. The old wheels seemed to groan again to be released, and the poor horse to stop every now and then to be lashed, as if flogging were really a relaxation compared to turning that useless multiplicity of ponderous wheels, and straining under such a moving weight of crushing timber, which seemed only placed there to kill the poor horses. The number of horses that had

dropped down and died there was notched in a huge oaken beam—the squared truuk of a gigantic tree—that supported the roof: many of the marks were black with age. The surrounding ground in which the old water-works stood, together with several old houses, was granted to the Dutchman, his heirs, and successors 'for ever,' under the conditions, that they were to find the horses for working the machinery, and to keep the latter in repair, without any charge to the inhabitants of Our Old Town, beyond that of one groat a year from every house supplied with water, together with the rent of the old houses that then stood adjoining the works. In the original grant no mention was made for extending the water-pipes as the town increased, neither was the number of hours stated that the works were to be kept in motion, nor any time named limiting the necessary repairs. The works had been sold over and over again; some who had bought them had died before the agreement was signed, and those who had sold them had ran away without signing it. They had been devoured by Chancery, and disgorged because a bidder could not be found, and the old timber was too tough, indigestible, and un-

profitable to lie long in that ever-gaping maw. The first lawsuit began in the time of James ; it lasted through the whole of the commonwealth, and was not settled until after the arrival of William of Orange. Another commenced in the reign of Anne, and those that rose while the sceptre was wielded by the whole of the four Georges, were Legion. And Our Old Town had in the end to pay the whole of the expenses. The works had been seized, and stopped, set in motion, and stopped again, by another injunction. Were a decent horse put inside, he had hardly time to give more than a turn or two, before he was seized and carried off for expenses. Men without number had been put in possession, left, forgotten, and never heard of again ; some said the rats had eaten them up—bones, boots and all. Judges dead and gone had granted rules for collecting the rents of the old adjoining houses, and other judges, dead and gone, had reversed the decisions of their learned predecessors.

The old miller whose arm was shattered by one of Cromwell's troopers had spent fifty golden pieces in carrying on a lawsuit against the owner of the water-works in his day, and after losing the trial

had fought him in the Queen Elizabeth inn-yard adjoining, as a document still preserved fully proves, when one William Wainright was 'his mainprize,' and did, after the fight, take hold of him by his hands, thereby making himself answerable for the miller's appearance at the Moot-hall of Our Old Town.





CHAPTER VI.

‘FRIEND JOHN,’ BECK-LANE, THE WANDERERS, AND
POOR OLD JOE.

I WAS much struck with the kindness the poorer classes showed to one another in the hour of trouble ; it proved that in spite of all their bickerings and backbitings ‘their hearts were in the right place,’ to use one of their own vernacularisms. A poor

widow, with three children, died suddenly at the end of harvest-time, leaving all the corn she and they had gleaned unthrashed, and stowed away under her poor flock bed and in her cupboards. Her washing was lying about unfinished when she died, some of it in the tub, and other portions hanging out in the little yard to dry. The poor widow was 'taken away' so suddenly, that the neighbours did not know anything had happened until they heard the children crying. The youngest rushed to the door, with its mouth full of bread-and-butter, and a large 'hunch' in its hand, exclaiming, 'Oh my mammy! Oh my dear mammy!' Their mother was giving them their tea, when she fell down and expired. The neighbours hurried in one upon the other, and having summoned the doctor, took away the children—one here—another there; those with the largest families seemed the most eager to take home one of the poor orphans; as they said, 'It is but another mouth to fill, and will neither make us richer nor poorer, and the poor bairn will sooner forget its troubles when it has our bairns to play with.' And so they divided the children amongst them. Then one finished the washing and another

the ironing ; while a third ‘tidied up’ the house. Others went from door to door amongst those who were as poor as themselves—for, thank God ! the very poor help one another, without complaining to the rich of their wants—to collect trifling sums for the funeral, and those who had nothing to give, borrowed of others who had a sixpence or so to lend until Saturday, when their husbands got their wages ; and then they paid back the solemn and sacred debt.

There was no undertaker — so called — in Our Old Town ; but the coffin was ordered of the joiner, who knew it would be paid for by instalments ; and out of the collection ‘a bit of black’ was purchased for the children, who followed their poor mother to the grave ; each led by the hand of a neighbour. When the funeral was over and a ‘decent time’ had elapsed, the corn which the poor widow had gleaned was thrashed and sold, and the sum it realized, together with what the furniture produced, was left in trust with some honest and well-to-do shopkeeper for the benefit of the children. Then the overseers, unasked, would call from time to time and see that the orphans were well supplied with clothes, and that they did not want for anything. Had they breathed

a word about putting the children into the workhouse, that little yard would have been too hot for them to have breathed in long—they might almost as well have thrust their heads into the fiery wasp's nest—for every neighbour would have rushed out with her burning tongue, and boiling kettle, had, what they considered, such an insult been offered to the orphans they had adopted as their own. Nay, even the little children amongst whom their lot was cast, treated them tenderly, and you might often hear, what Milton calls

‘—imperfect words, with childish trips,
Half unpronounced, slide through some infant lips,’

interceding in their behalf, and saying ‘Don't hurt poor little Johnny, he's no fader, no mudder.’ They forced none into the workhouse in Our Old-fashioned Town, at the time of which I write; but, if necessary, allowed them out-of-door relief, and left them to live in comparative comfort, and die in peace, surrounded by their humble household treasures, under the lowly roof that had so long sheltered all their joys and sorrows. All who received this relief were well known, for it was generally granted at the

intercession of those who paid the poor-rate, so that imposition could never remain long unconcealed, and such could not long endure the ‘loosening of the tongues’ that would speak on these matters in Our Old Town. He with whom the money was put out on trust for the three orphans, was a careful, honest, amiable, pains-taking Quaker—a man who never wasted the value of a cheeseparing, if seven years hoarding of it up would realize the smallest portion of a farthing. For years he withstood all the ‘theeings and thouings’ of the sweet dove-coloured sisterhood, who used every now and then to alight in his well-to-do shop, and coo, and hop about, and ‘friend John’ him so much, that it was a marvel how he could resist such soft temptation and remain a bachelor. What a picture he was of contentment! sitting behind the counter in his long bow-windowed low-fronted shop, his clean white apron spread over his knees, often nursing his beautiful sleek cat, while his little black pug-dog reposed at his feet, as with pipe in mouth and half-closed eyes he rocked himself to and fro, and the Spirit carried him, he wist not whither, as he kept up a low purring sound that seemed like a chorus to the cat’s ‘thrumming.’ Then

his reverie would be broken by the very silence that reigned around, and which told that his mite of a boy was not employed ; so, opening his dreamy-looking eyes, he would turn to the lad without ceasing the rocking motion, or wholly breaking up his drowsy purring, and say ‘Canst thee find nothing to do’ (pur, pur, pur) ; ‘I think if thou lookest thou’lt find that the black pepper drawer is getting rather low’ (hum, hum, hum), ‘and that we shall hardly have coffee enough to supply our neighbours over to-morrow.’ And while the little fellow—who had to stand on a box to reach the mills—kept on grinding away, the cat purred, and the good Quaker hummed between every few whiffs of his pipe, while the creaking motion of the chair chimed in pleasantly with the drowsy concert. And so he had rocked, and smoked, and purred through thirty long years, without ever having kept holiday, or having a care to break his sleep, beyond that of hoarding up his halfpence until they amounted to shillings ; and his shillings until they grew into guineas ; and without ever having had a thought of love. He did not live in his long low old-fashioned shop, as that would have been more expensive than the cheap lodgings he occupied five

doors off, for he would have had to have paid extra taxes had he turned it into a dwelling-house, beside paying for a servant ; 'as it was, he had only to see that his back door was securely fastened every night after his shop was closed, and hurry off to the 'good-stuff' woman's, who had his supper ready for him to the very minute. Ten minutes was all the time he ever allowed himself, to go, eat his dinner, and return. When it was quite ready and smoking on the table, the little 'good-stuff woman' came and tapped at his shop window, keeping her eye on her own door at the same time, when he would nod his head, snap his finger for the dog to follow, and off they would run together with a bark and a bound, while the little woman kept watch at the door until they returned, and saw that the mite of a boy and the cat did not misconduct themselves during his brief absence. He paid ready money for everything, if he could only get 'an eighth' per cent. by it, and was never known to waste a bit of string or a morsel of paper in his life. The boys shunned his sugar hogsheads—they knew that all the scraping in the world would not have sufficed to supper a fly after he had done with them, the very wasps that had

been tempted to come out of their way by the smell of the wood, seemed more waspish while buzzing about his empty hogsheads than those of any other grocer's. Excepting smoking and rocking himself, his only amusement was to sit and read the fragments of old books which formed a part of the waste-paper he purchased. These, alas ! proved his bane : in an ill-starred hour he found a work on 'Love,' and the 'Happiness of the Married State ;' he had purchased it of a pretty widow who was not a Quakeress, and who had no doubt sent it in purposely among a quantity of waste-paper, and as she was constantly presenting herself while he perused the snareful pages, having given her servant a holiday, she and it soon broke up the spiritual tranquillity which had so long enfolded him like a cloud. She knew that he was a 'shy bird,' so stole in upon him silently, cautiously, timidly, with a kind of 'hush, hush,' that startled him not. She sat upon the salt-bin, while he mended her pens or weighed what she wanted. 'She was never in any hurry, not she ; she would wait while he served his other customers,' at which he would say 'Thank thee,' and sigh. She was very pretty, and had all that mild soft sweet persuasive-

ness which belongs to the Quakers. She had also a low liquid voice which soon told on him, for while she was present he would walk up and down behind his counter and sigh. This would never do ; she knew that she must advance to succeed, and a small, almost imperceptible, bit of wood did it. One day she rushed in with a ‘ Friend John, I’ve run a splint in my finger, and it’s very painful ; wilt thee be good enough to try and get it out with thy sharp-pointed penknife,’ and as she spake she held out her soft white beautiful hand. He took it up, put on his glasses, held it as tenderly as if it had been a dove, pressed it, touched it with the point of his knife ; then throwing the knife down, said ‘ I cannot find in my heart to hurt thee’—sat down, took up his pipe, rocked himself, gave half-a-dozen whiffs, got up, took a turn or two behind the counter, then stopped to look at her as she sat grave and silent on the salt-bin, hanging her head aside like ‘ Shakspeare’s Barbara,’ and pressing the wounded finger. At last of all he leant over the counter, took up her hand again, looked at it, then at her, saying, ‘ Neighbour, I love thee greatly ;’ then sat down to smoke and rock himself with redoubled energy ; and when he

again opened his eyes she was gone. And so when he was in his ‘sere and yellow leaf’ she led him to church—led his affection away from his cat and dog to herself; and he no longer hummed to the ‘desert air,’ or purred to the grit and grinding of his mills; but sunk like a bird beside its mate into a quiet, drowsy, drab-coloured kind of love, from which he was sometimes startled by the sharp pecking of his pretty partner, when he would raise his head, give a low acquiescing coo, and leave her to manage matters just as she pleased.

Friend John lent money occasionally on unexceptionable security; and the way he came into possession of the old row of houses in Beck-lane was very characteristic of the man. The property was rather heavily mortgaged, and the owner, a very extravagant man, wanting a further advance of one hundred pounds, applied to the saving and moneyed Quaker. Friend John had examined all the documents, and satisfied himself that the investment would be safe, and easily paid off by the proposed instalments in rent, providing the borrower lived within anything like reasonable limits. An evening was appointed to settle the business, and when the borrower came, the

polite Quaker invited him to be seated, and said, 'Friend, wilt thee take a pipe with me?' to which the other made no objection, and so they sat smoking and talking about the matter for a whole long hour, the Quaker handing him a light every time his pipe went out, or when he refilled it. At length the visitor, weary of smoking and talking, and considering the business as fairly settled, rose to depart, saying, 'When am I to have the money?' Friend John, having carefully shaken the ashes out of his pipe, and placed it on the hob, said, 'Friend, thee art very extravagant and very wasteful. I have given thee a light to thy pipe six times to-night, and every time thou hast thrown the spill into the fire, often having only used it once. I have lighted my own pipe four times and not used one spill yet, as thou mayest see by looking on the hob, where a full half of it lies unconsumed. I will not lend thee this money in the way thou wishest, but if thou wilt call upon me again to-morrow, I will tell thee what I have to propose.' He did call, and was so satisfied with Friend John's offer, that he placed the whole of his affairs in his hands, and never lived to repent having done so. And after his death dog

old row of houses became the honest Quaker's property.

This Beck-lane, or Water-lane—for every reader knows that beck is an old Saxon word for brook, stream, or any description of water-course—was one of the three ancient roads that cut across the town from the hills to the river, as was before mentioned when describing the quarrel about the plank and the inn-yard. Riverward this ancient lane came out opposite the old town staith, under a low dark archway, whose thick iron-bound gates opened into the main street. Hillward it ran up in a level line with a deep dry ravine, the highest side of which was so precipitous that it could only be ascended by holding on by the projecting shrubs, and resting every now and then on the ridgy water-marks, which formed narrow ledges, or table-lands, showing how, at some undated period, the water had from time to time subsided, when it rushed and roared and emptied itself into the river, ages before a living inhabitant had planted a foot on the shores of Our Old Town. It must have been some sudden and terrible convulsion that split asunder that mighty hill—some deafening and overwhelming de-

luge that roared and rolled and ploughed deeper that dizzy ravine, across the widest part of which a good slinger could have hurled a stone. There was nothing resembling this deep yawning chasm along the whole miles of hills that bridged the landscape behind Our Old Town, along the whole length of the river, either inland or seaward, that rolled at their green and sloping feet. As for the Beck that once flowed between these steep green walls, and tinkled in unison with the bells of the pack-horses as they were driven from the hilly towns along the lane to the ancient water-staith, it has long since disappeared —one of the few picturesque features that has vanished from our old streets. Here and there you may find traces of it in a field or two at the entrance of the deep valley, where a few huge decaying willows and stunted alders still droop their branches over the dried-up bed of the beck, as if looking for something which they have lost and will never find again ; in the steep embankment that bound some of the gardens which run along the lane, telling you of lovers' walks and whispered vows, uttered by those who have, long centuries ago, slumbered beneath the green turf in our old churchyard. The hoary haw-

thorns that stand in those fields, and that were old at the Reformation, seemed to me different to any other trees that I have ever seen, for there were traces of human countenances in their gnarled branches, and outlines of strange forms in their age-twisted stems.

I have often thought that in very ancient times—much more remote than any which the oldest records of our town make mention of—that this lane was the only road from the hills, and that the water-staith was the only ferry across the river for leagues, as a little village a mile or two inland from the opposite shore, still bears a name that signifies the hamlet of the beck. The name of the field that faces, and is divided from the ancient staith by the intervening river, is called Chule-garth, meaning the boat-field, for chiule is both the old Saxon and Danish name for boat. Compared with the streets and buildings that follow the course of the river, it always seemed to me that those branching hillward from the market-place were comparatively modern, though many of them contained houses two or three centuries old; that for many long years after the river-side streets were formed, all around the old market-place to the base of the green hills was fields, excepting here

and there a little 'holm,' by which branches from the beck flowed and watered the rural homesteads, which still retain their old names of South-holm, North-holm, just according to the points in which they lie. When you leave the river for any distance, there are no traces of that dim antiquity in which it is so delightful to lose oneself, as we try to trace back things from their beginning, and get benighted among the darkened shadows of time : the very names of places that lay around bore the mind back to those primitive ages when our 'grey fore-fathers' pastured their flocks and herds in the plains beside rivers ; and as Jordan had its 'Cars,' which the patriarchs of old 'lifted up their eyes and saw,' so have we still plains bearing the same old Hebrew names, that stretch far and wide from the river-banks of Our Old Town. By whom were those rich expanses of open pasture land first called by the Eastern and Scriptural name of Cars? the very name which Abraham gave to the plains of Jordan when he first beheld them. Alas! we can never know. I have looked upon that river as it flowed until I fancied that it seemed instinct with life, and full of old intelligence, of which we know nothing ;

that the lapping waves ever murmured it to the deep bed along which they rolled, babbling of the remote past in a language of their own, that was only spoken by the first inhabitants who pastured their cattle beside these ancient shores.

In the neighbourhood of Beck-lane were three or four courts of little old houses, that were perfect mysteries; they were built principally of timber, and so massy were the beams, joists, and ribs, that many believe they were originally intended for large mansions, but for some unknown cause were never carried higher than the ground floor, then roofed in. Each of these courts lay full six feet lower than the main street from which they were entered, proving that the front houses, and the passages with their steep steps, were built long after these strange barn-shaped wooden houses were erected. It puzzled you to tell how they came there —why the main street was so high, while they lay so low, yet were only separated by a single house from the pavement. You wondered whether in the olden time they were reached by back roads of which no traces remain, while the street continued to rise higher age after age, as the front houses decayed,

or were rebuilt, until their very foundations were on a level with the roofs of these long, low, undated dwellings. Were these some of the first buildings erected in Our Old Town? many thought they were. Everything about them was strong enough to support a church, and the massy oaken beams bore marks of the rude axe: there was no sign of a plane having passed over any of the wood-work. Chimneys there were none, saving what had been made centuries after those massy walls were built, and thatched over: as for the little openings in which glass casements are now placed, you could tell at a glance that modern windows were unknown when those rude beams formed the square apertures by which light and air were admitted. Could they have been granaries in ancient times? Were they the dwellings of the villen and servi of the soil? Was there no street beside the river when they were built? Those grey and weather-bleached timbers, which had stood through the tempests of centuries of winters, only echoed back the questions, but could give no answer of their own in reply.

Worthy of the stability of these ancient fabrics was the friendship of two old men, who had dwelt

in them all their lives, and their fathers before them for many generations. When boys they went together to the free grammar school, founded in the reign of Henry the Eighth, and for sixty years, summer and winter, they had rambled together on a Sunday round the neighbourhood of Our Old Town. They knew every forest and footpath for miles away ; not a heath or a moorland stretched beyond the hills, but what they had traversed together ; they were familiar with every spot where the rarest linnets built, and the sweetest nightingales sung, and knew places through which they could ramble a long league

‘Full ankle deep in lilies of the vale ;’

banks purple with the perfumed violet, and shady spots that were blue as the open eye of heaven with the blue bells of spring. They came home laden with May blossom before a spray had whitened anywhere in the miles of hawthorn hedges that walled the daisied fields of Our Old Town ; they gathered wild apples and pears in the depths of dim woods, from trees, that no one saving themselves knew where to find ; and there was scarcely

a bird, reptile, or quadruped, that sheltered in the green twilight of our old seldom-explored forests, but what they had at one time or another caught one of and brought home. Though they both had to work hard for their daily bread, it sweetened their labours to talk over and think about the sweet secluded places they should visit when Sunday came. In spring and summer they started out at early dawn, and in winter they lost not a minute of the shortened daylight, but devoted it all to some rural ramble, no matter how deep the snow lay on the ground, or if the black frost made the roads ring like iron. Many waited at the ends of the courts and yards to watch their return in spring, that they might see the first of the early wild flowers, which they were sure to find and bring back with them. They often said, 'that they could not live if they did not have a long walk into the country once a week, and that all the difference winter made, was that they got over the ground a little faster, to keep their blood in circulation, and that as for rain, why, when once it got to the skin it could get no further, and while there was as much blue about the sky as would make a pair of breeches, there was always

hope of it turning out a fine day.' I sometimes wondered to myself, what the survivor would do, were one of them to die. Whether he would wander through their old haunts all alone, or give up his healthy exercise, and sit in his old house silent and solitary, mope, pine, and sigh for a little time, then die, and be laid beside his old friend in the still churchyard? I wondered whether they ever talked of this when they were out together, and if they did, what they said they should do? I always fancied that the birds they reared seemed less like prisoners than any others I had seen confined in cages; they brought from the fields and woods the same food they fed upon when free, and while spring, summer, and autumn lasted, hung their cages with such green and shady plants, as they in their wanderings had noticed birds to be the fondest of. And all the week long while pursuing their in-door labour, in those old-world houses, they had birds to sing to them, flowers to look upon, and beautiful green branches, which they knew how to keep alive longer than anybody I ever knew; all of which filled the inward eye with shifting pictures of the pleasant places they had visited, and the shady spots

in which they had been gathered. They in their old age seemed like

‘A lusty winter, frosty but kindly,’

and beneath which might be ever seen some stir of life that denoted the burgeoning of spring. Another old wanderer—though he had moved about the country on business instead of pleasure—lived at the entrance of the court in which these aged friends dwelt. This man was a retired shoemaker, who had saved money enough to live upon by riding from fair to fair, and market to market, in the company of other travellers with pack-horses, who carried their goods in saddle-bags, and dorsers, and rode with loaded pistols in their holsters, when the ill-made roads were beset by mounted highwaymen and blood-thirsty footpads. He delighted to rest his arm on his half-door, or chalk on the upper part of that swung back, plans of the roads he had travelled, while he talked about his ‘hair-breadth escapes’ on dark nights in lonely places. At the time of which I am writing, he was turned of eighty, and had commenced travelling when he was twenty years of age, and knew men then, who had

been on the road half a century, and who had known others when they were young, who had journeyed to and fro for the same number of years ; so that his stories came down all through the reigns of the Georges, back to the time of Anne and William of Orange, and touched on the borders of the Civil Wars. No book ever written contained such interesting accounts of old roads, old inns, old towns, daring travellers, fearless highwaymen, lonely houses, wild woods, pathless moorlands, hideous gibbet-posts, road-side murders, solitary toll-gates, and real ghosts, as he knew, had seen, or heard of. He could plant his foot upon spots where robbers had been shot and buried, without jury or inquest, by these old wanderers on wild commons, fern-clad heaths, and gorse-covered moors ; and which were unknown to any living soul saving himself ; and many a wild tale did he tell of those who mouldered in these coffinless graves, and of the stout-hearted wayfarers who struck the blow, or fired the shot, that sent the road-side robbers to their last sleep. With him died many an oral history of wild adventures that can never be recovered, for his memory stretched further back into the past, and reached

to more remote stories and traditions, than were known to any other person in Our Old Town.

In the same court, and in one of those ancient houses, lived, until he was removed into the workhouse to die, poor Old Joe.. For years he had wandered about Our Old Town, with his darned hose ungartered, and hanging about his heels, the tie of his neckerchief sometimes under one ear, his waistcoat unbuttoned, and his crownless hat, worn the wrong side uppermost, and nothing between his grey pate and the sun and rain. If you said to him, 'Why do you wear your hat upside down?' he would reply, 'Because the world's upside down with poor Old Joe.' That poor crazed man was once the great banker of Our Old Town, and had occupied the finest modern mansion in the market-place. He failed and never looked up afterwards; he gave up all he possessed in the world to his hard-hearted creditors, even to the gold mourning ring he wore in memory of the beautiful young wife he had lost; they returned him nothing, and he became a poor harmless idiot, who lived upon the charity of a little industrious old woman that had once been his cook. A little

child could make him tremble and run away, by telling him that his creditors were coming to take him to the county jail. Sometimes he would sit on one of the low ornamental posts, from which chains were suspended before the splendid mansion that had once been his own, and when a crowd gathered round him, he would point to the windows, and tell them what furniture each room contained ; and now and then amid the group might be seen a grey-headed man or two, who after listening to him would say, ‘ Ay ! ay ! it’s all true what he says, poor Old Joe was a kind good master.’ Those old men had been his servants in the days of his prosperity, and were too poor to render him any assistance ; nor did he require much, while his industrious little cook was able to work. Sometimes he would sit down, and counting his fingers, try to number the names of those who had banked with him, and to enumerate the vast sums he once had in his possession. The poor little old cook, who scarcely reached up to his elbow—for he was full six feet high, and had stood higher before his troubles made him stoop—used to take hold of his hand when she walked out with him, and talk to him, just as

she would have done to a child, promising what nice things she would prepare for his dinner, for that dear little old woman never forgot, that he had once been her kind indulgent master. Poor Old Joe! one true heart, while ever it beat, clung to thee in all thy adversity, and all the wealth in the world could not have purchased a firmer, fonder friend. The glimmerings thou hadst of the past, were like the broken fragments of a dream; and a strange delight didst thou seem at times to find in recalling such portions of it as came abrupt and disjointed before thee. Peace to his memory!

‘After life’s fitful fever he sleeps well;’

for kind mother earth finds as soft a pillow for the pauper as the prince when she admits them, without distinction, into that great common lodging-house the grave.

Nor must I forget his old barber, who continued to shave him and dress his few last ‘sad grey hairs’ whenever he called, and who never failed in presenting him with some trifle after. That honest barber was one of the politest and most gentlemanly of men—so clean, and smelling of

such nice soap, and he cut the children's hair so close, and powdered their heads so beautifully afterwards, that when they walked out of his shop, they looked like so many little grey-headed men and women. He belonged to the age when club and pig-tails were worn, and came into closer contact with the gentlemen of Our Old Town, than barbers generally are permitted to do ; this made him so gentlemanly. He mixed his lather for shaving in a bright brass basin that had a piece cut out to fit under the chin ; thus pleasantly conjuring up during the operation Don Quixote and Malbrino's helmet ; and he had little pockets at the front of his new white apron in which he kept curious little instruments, whose uses are unknown to the degenerated race of barbers of the present day. Then his jackets ! so clean, and striped so delicately with light blue, lilac, or pink stripes ; and the bow he made before taking you by the nose. Oh ! it was a treat to have your nose pulled in so polite and gentlemanly a fashion : and while he scraped you under the chin, and you raised your eyes, you sat admiring the little three-cornered leaden cistern that nearly touched the top of the ceiling, with its

quaint figures that were in the attitude of dancing, and playing on such oddly-shaped instruments as have no doubt many a time sounded at the ancient merrymakings in Our Old Town. His wife, too! who must have been very pretty in her younger years, was a nice clean kind lady-like old woman, with a little pursed-up mouth, that seemed made purposely to chirrup to her bright yellow, ever-singing canaries, and eat the sweet delicious puddings and custards which poor old Joe got many a taste of, and which few beside herself knew how to make. Neither dust nor dirt could have settled down upon her for long together if they had tried, for they would soon have felt uncomfortable, and abandoned such clean companionship. I often wondered whether the beautiful view they had over the low wharf-wall of the river, and the bright green open country beyond its banks, had anything to do with their remarkable cleanliness? I sometimes fancied that seeing nature in such neat attire, with her hawthorn hedges so white, her flowers so fresh, and her fields so sweetly green, must have had some influence in producing their cleanly habits. The gusts of fresh air and bursts of sunshine that ever

blew and streamed in at their doors and windows seemed to dart upon and point out dirt as a guilty thing, and to leave it no peace until removed ; and I have since thought that when light and air are admitted more freely into our dwellings, we shall have less disease, less vice, and much more health and happiness than is now enjoyed, either in our great cities or in Our Old Town.





CHAPTER VII.

ROBBERS ; A NEVER-DO-WELL ; THE FLOOD ; MOVING ACCIDENTS.

THERE was only one solitary watchman at the period of which I write in Our Old Town ; so that when midnight settled down upon it, all was generally silent. Sometimes a vessel came up with the tide, and the voices of men and the rattle of

chains might be heard for a few minutes, as they dropped the anchor, or made her fast to the mooring-piles beside the wharves; or one of the 'long carriers,' as those were called who journeyed to the neighbouring market-towns, might come in late, through having a heavier load than usual. Or the tramp of horses' feet would startle the stillness that had settled down on the old streets, as some one came galloping in haste to summon a doctor from one of the adjoining villages; or he might be called up to attend some one in the town, the messenger walking before him with a lantern. But with these rare exceptions, the town was generally as still of a night as a well-regulated household in which all the inmates are asleep. And such had been its state for years, until one morning the town was startled by the bellman proclaiming a reward for the discovery of a robbery in the large cheese-warehouse. Twenty large rich, thick Cheshire cheeses had been stolen at one sweep. The whole town was in a state of agitation. Some said it must have been committed by strangers to the town, who had come with a horse and cart, as it must have taken a number of men to have carried away so great a weight of

goods. Others said they were no strangers, but that the robbers were well acquainted with the premises. A skilful burglar, with a well-tempered nail, might have picked almost any lock in Our Old Town. Men of all sorts were constantly going in and out of this large cheese-warehouse helping to lade vessels, and several hands were regularly employed in keeping the floors clean, and turning the cheeses, and the whole air around the place was redolent of cheese. Bills were printed, and rewards offered, and the big, fat, chief constable, with his lean, hunger-bitten deputies, were as busy as bees in the season of blossoms. The reward was worth trying to gain, and no doubt they had settled amongst themselves how it was to be divided. They bustled and poked about here, and there, and everywhere. As some of the wags said, 'only to smell cheese put them on the scent.' Some remembered that they thought they had heard a cart in the street on the night of the robbery, (the warehouse was in the very centre of the main street,) but they might have been dreaming, and they couldn't 'say positive;' so in the end, for fear, as they said, of 'committing themselves,' what they did say amounted to nothing

at all. But there was evidence—a cart, horse, and men were seen, and the carrier who saw them spoke to the men, and bade them ‘good-night,’ thinking they had come from the country for a load. He was returning late, and the thought that anything wrong was going on never entered the honest-minded fellow’s head. But before the affair had half ‘blown over,’ several sacks of malt were missing from the premises of a large maltster. A cart must have been in requisition again, for no man could carry a sack of malt far without resting. In the train of the malt followed sacks of flour, and several hundred weight of hams and flitches of bacon. Then groceries came next, and it was said that whoever the robbers might be, ‘they knew what was good, and how to live.’ Justice was at fault for a long time, while the little town was in a commotion, and the whitesmiths in full employment. The whole talk was of bolts, locks, and keys. Still there was no talk of additional watchmen.

That extensive robberies were committed, was plain enough; and everybody inquired who, where, and what were the thieves. These questions were asked by everybody; there was nothing else talked

about in this hitherto torpid little town. Crowds gathered around the premises that had been plundered; examined every visible thing; had no end of 'gills of ale,' and then arrived at the conclusion that it was 'strange! very strange!' and so it was. No person had ever been employed to watch any of these warehouses within the memory of man. Many of the inhabitants had not even a lock upon their house doors; or if they had, the key had been broken or lost years before. Some of the doors were fastened by a wooden bar, which fell into a staple. Many of the large warehouses were only secured on the outside with a common padlock. People went out, turned the key in the door, and left it there projecting out of the lock. Others hung it up behind the shutter; some opened the window and laid it on the ledge inside; while the very cautious left it with the next door neighbour. They never took the key with them for fear of losing it; and the sensation created by the issuing of hand-bills, at the top of which the printer had placed the royal arms, and which requested the inhabitants, on account of the many extensive robberies that had been committed, to see that their

doors were properly secured, almost created as great a sensation in the town as if it had been besieged, and they had been called upon to make preparations for resisting the enemy. Never, perhaps, had such consternation been caused in Our Old Town since the day when Cromwell's troopers charged through the streets, and drove the Royalists into the marshy bog at the town-end, where among many others the colonel was slain by the stern Protector's lieutenant, Whalley. It was quite a harvest for the whitesmiths, locksmiths, and blacksmiths, and the common inquiry of one neighbour of another was, 'Have you had your lock done yet?' Still robberies were committed, and the expert thieves left not a clue by which they could be traced.

At length it was noticed that one or two coal-porters and corn-porters did not take such trouble to look after a day's work as they had formerly done; that they were frequently seen idling and talking together, and spent more money in the ale-houses than they could have come by honestly. On inquiry it was also found that they had scarcely any dealings with the shopkeepers, seldom entered the grocer's, and that from the quantity of corn sent to grind, the

miller had remarked that they must have had 'famous gleaning ;' that in passing there was constantly a smell of frying ham or bacon, and that the man who bought their 'swill' for his pigs, frequently found large pieces of bread, cheese, and bacon in the waste-tub, and said that they were the richest dish-washings he brought home.

It was some time before this became the general talk ; at first it only extended to the row of houses at the 'town's end' which I have described, then the rumour reached the backway and up to the ditch, where there was such a squabble about the plank and the right-of-way, by degrees it got 'up-town,' was talked about at the water-staith, with the addition that at one time or another all these men had been employed in the warehouses that were robbed. The little town became more excited ; search-warrants had been obtained, and constables had been seen to enter their houses ; this one had gone in, and that one had waited outside, and the third one was seen to have something like a pistol projecting from his pocket. And the constables became greater men than ever, looked more mysterious, spoke not even to their friends, but barely nodded, and as some remarked, 'it was

wonderful how they could spare time even to do that, so much as they must have had on their minds.' Then came other rumours of how this man who was suspected was going 'to have the law' of the constables, and had been for advice to a solicitor; and how another's wife had said that her husband should have a counsellor from London and sue them for I hardly know what amount of damages; and those who were in favour of the suspected parties whose houses had been searched said, 'serve them right, the villains;' and those who were against them kept what they thought to themselves, or conversed privately with one another. Nothing, however, was found that could be sworn to, although it was remarked that all their cupboards were well supplied, and that their wives were well stocked with new dresses, indeed far beyond the generality of women whose husbands followed such humble occupations. On the whole, though nothing could be proved, suspicion was strengthened, and those who valued their characters stood aloof from both the men and their wives. The quantity of property stolen would, it was said, have filled a fair-sized room; but nowhere could it be found, nor any portion of it

that could be identified. One of the men kept a cow, and he lived in one of the oldest of the houses in the row that faced the bridge. It looked as if it had been a house of some note in former days, and occupied by a farmer, from the number of outhouses. Some said that more than a century ago it was called the Ferry House, and that there was no field then, but all was open to the river-edge before the bridge was built, and that it was the residence of the ferryman. It had, however, been searched from hearth-stone to roof-tree, but in no antique nook was anything found, and it is probable never would have been, had the matter rested only with the sleek, sleepy, stupid constables of Our Old Town.

Whence he came, or what was his business, or who he was, no one seemed to know, at least those who did kept the secret. He was a neat, sharp-looking, dapper little man, who jumped off the coach one Saturday evening, and made himself quite at home with the company at the 'Black Boy' parlour, before he had been amongst them an hour. They said 'he had an eye like an hawk, and sang like a nightingale.' They all shook hands with him, and hoped they should be better acquainted. And he

made the 'Black Boy' his 'head-quarters,' as he said, 'because he found such agreeable company.' They showed him the Old Town—they showed him everything, even the warehouses that had been robbed, and the houses that had been searched for the stolen property. Nay, he went in, he talked with the people, admitted it was hard that innocent people should be suspected, and they said he was the kindest and most feeling man they had ever talked to. The woman showed him all over what was called the old Ferry House, even to her cow, and kept chatting with him while she milked, and he went away delighted, and that night delighted the company more than ever in the 'Black Boy' parlour.

Next morning this 'most feeling man' entered the cow-house again, while the obliging woman was milking, and with a brief sharp 'I must trouble you to move, ma'am,' beckoned in the constables who were waiting outside, bade them turn out the cow, and turn up the straw, saying, 'there's a cellar here.' And lo! underneath the loose stones which the straw had concealed, was found a thick heavy trap-door, which when uplifted revealed a row of old

stone steps that led into an immense vault, in which stood piles of cheese, bacon, hams, sacks of corn, malt, casks of ale, chests of tea, bags of coffee, rice, and sugar, quantities of tobacco, spirits, wine, cloth, in short the produce of all the robberies that had been committed, excepting what the robbers had consumed ; for as one of the deputies said, ‘they must have lived like fighting-cocks.’ And that neat dapper agreeable feeling little man was one of the smartest of the old Bow-street officers, who on his first visit discovered that the floor of the cow-house was hollow, and who before he had been a week in the town had all the stolen property removed away, and every robber in custody. The discovery and the capture of every man was done in an hour, for he so laid his plans that they could not escape. One robber was missing, so he entered the yard, asked a question or two—no, he could not be found anywhere—entered the house, looked about, took off his hat, looked up the chimney, and said ‘pull him down,’ then walked away just as if nothing uncommon had happened. Oh ! what a day was that, when all those men handcuffed were marched in a row to the ‘Moot-hall,’ and among them the one

that was dragged down the chimney, covered with soot, without even allowing him time to wash himself. Beside them walked the nice feeling little dapper man, with a flower in his button-hole, and so unlike the make-believe-to-be-busy town constables, ever ready with his ‘ah! how do—glad to see you,’ to every one he knew, ‘just as,’ they said, ‘he did when he walked into the “Black Boy” parlour, and called for his gill of ale.’ There were horses in every stable, and not one in a dozen of the doors was locked, and carts in scores of sheds, so that nothing was easier than to help themselves to any conveyance they chose. So the nice dapper little man ‘who had the eye of a hawk, and sang like a nightingale,’ got all the reward, and all the robbers transported, and like the Babes in the Wood,

‘Never more they saw that man
Returning’ ‘to the town;’

though he was talked about long afterwards by the old customers in the parlour of the ‘Black Boy.’

And so the ‘gang’ was broken up, and many a ‘roasting’ did the deputy constables get about having to send for that sharp little fellow from

London to help them, until there was but little doubt that they wished he had been 'at Hanover,' or further, for as they said 'everybody was flinging him in their teeth.' Nay, if even they threatened to 'take up' the mere boys, the impudent little scoundrels before they ran off would say that they would have to send for the man from London to help them.

And when all was over, what gossiping there was amongst the women about the wives of the robbers, such as 'I always said that fine shawl Mrs. Thingemterry wore was never got by honest hard work, didn't I?'—'Thou did, my lass,' the other would reply, 'and if thou remembers I made the same remark about the fine bombazeen that Mrs. Thingumbob had made up by the "up-town" tip-topping mantua-makers; the like of her going there! so many good dressmakers as there are to be had "down-town," and who are always thankful for a day's work and a meal's victuals.' When they were very 'sweet' with one another, they called each other my lass, and any one whose name they did not wish to mention was either 'Mrs. Thingemterry, Thingumbob, or What-do-you-call-em.' Anyone

whom they did not like they wished 'at Hanover or further,' a saying which no doubt had its origin from William of Orange, and which showed the leaning in past times, in this old-fashioned town, to the unfortunate Stuarts. A quantity of gold was once seized on one of the wharves, by order of the government of the day, which had been sent from London by the adherents of the Pretender. I believe documents are still in existence connected with the whole transaction, and that the seizure of the money was most fatal to the designs of the Stuarts. The place teemed with these old-world stories, most of which were, beyond doubt, true; and while you listened, you could not help thinking how much more interesting and entertaining history would be if its writers would collect more of these old homely country traditions.

There was one man in the town, who was killed in an ale-house brawl, that was feared and hated by everybody excepting his handsome wife, and beautiful children. I, perhaps, was one of the few who honoured that woman for clinging to her husband through every evil report, because he was her husband, and she felt that the more enemies he had, the more

it was her duty to stand his friend. He was a sad fellow ; not, however, altogether bad, but he found a delight in annoying people and giving them nicknames. He feared no one, I question much if he ever knew what fear was ; he gloried in a fight ; size and science were of no consideration with him ; if he were beaten, his conqueror was also terribly punished, for he was, to use one of their vernacular phrases, 'hard as nails.' He cared no more for the constables than he did for a shower of rain ; indeed they would at any time rather have been ten miles another way than within hail, when called upon to assist those by whom he was assailed. The magistrates committed him to prison, and the very day he was liberated he renewed the assault ; he lit his pipe with their summonses, threw himself on one of his blood-horses, and led his pursuers a chase over half the country, leaping toll-gates as if they were only yard-high hurdles. He would draw the best-mounted constable from his brother officers in the pursuit, and when he saw that the latter was ahead and alone, turn his horse and unseat him with a single blow, then over hedge and ditch, and serve the next comer the same. Such a character, although he had no

friends, was not without his admirers, for among the very lowest orders of society, however right the law may be, it is but seldom popular. One day, and not the first time by many a one, he renewed his attacks upon a poor fellow who in the season went from ale-house to ale-house with oysters. Having thrown his oysters, basket and all, on the back of the fire, he threatened to throw the man after them, and although he had really no such intent, laid hold of him, and being a very powerful man thrust him towards the fire. The oyster-man had just commenced serving a customer when he was attacked, and having the oyster-knife in his hand, drove it into his assailant and killed him on the spot. He was tried, and through the provocation, and the previous character of the man he had killed, was of course acquitted. ‘But,’ as the people said, ‘he never was himself again, never held his head up after.’ The poor fellow, after his trial, had no other means of obtaining a livelihood excepting by following his former calling—going round from ale-house to ale-house, as he had done aforetime. But *that* house he never could be induced to enter again; when he reached it he ceased his usual cry, looked

upon the ground, and remained silent until he had passed by the door. If those within called after him, he took no notice, turned not his head, but heaved a sigh, and remaining silent went on his way, nor raised his voice again until far beyond their hearing. He had also in his rounds to pass the shop of the man he had killed, and at the door of which the wife or children of the deceased would be standing. The son promised to become as wild a scapegrace as the father, and would sometimes call out after the poor oyster-seller, ' Ah ! you villain who murdered my father, ain't you frightened his ghost should jump on your back when you pass his door ?' The poor fellow made no answer, but went on his way. But worse than the son was a youth, half ostler, half jockey, and all rogue, a little rascal who would have gone through fire and water for his ruffianly master, and who seemed attached to him through some such unexplainable feeling as that which causes an ill-used dog still to be faithful to its master. This little scamp was a second Flibbertigibbet, could ride his deceased master's blood-horses at full gallop without either saddle or bridle, or leap gate or hedge with outspread arms as if he had been

rivetted to the horse. He would stand on the shop-step at times with a halter in his hand, when he was going or had returned from 'fetching up' the horses, and would throw the halter around the oyster-man's neck as he exclaimed, ' You know this is what you ought to have had for murdering my master. I should like to hang you with it, and will some day, when I get bigger.' The poor fellow would make no reply, but release the halter from his neck and follow his calling, looking as if he felt that he had committed murder, and that neither the acquittal of judge nor jury could remove that ever-accusing impression from his mind.

These were among the darkest shadows that settled upon Our Old Town ; for it had its suicides, its gloomy catalogue of hangings and drownings, through despair, and melancholy, and disappointed love, and all other ills ' which flesh is heir to,' and so had had no doubt for centuries. Nor did it lack its ' moving accidents by flood or field,' for in the winter the fields and marshes for miles around were flooded, and the cattle drowned unless collected beforehand on the hills and higher grounds. And sometimes the high spring-tides would rise and overflow its ancient

streets, and boats be seen rowing from door to door, and the little entries would be dammed up with boards and ‘warp,’ for such the soil of the river-shore was called, and which the sun baked up into hard clay. Then the good-natured sailors might be seen rowing their boats in the streets, and ferrying milkmen, butchers, bakers, publicans, and other tradesmen from house to house, while the inhabitants had to take in their supplies of milk, meat, bread, beer, and other necessaries at the windows, which greatly delighted the children, who thrust out their heads, as far as they were permitted, to look up and down the river-like streets. But these floods made dreadful havoc of both houses and goods, spoiling almost everything in the cellars and on the ground-floors, and throwing, for months after the waters had subsided, melancholy gloom over Our Old Town. Mad bulls would break out of fields, and run bellowing through its streets, and wild horses would run away with their riders, and vessels would break from their moorings, and be carried away headlong by the strong tides and dashed against the bridge, where their masts would ‘snap like carrots’ as they lay ‘foul’ of one another. Boys would get lost in the

great woods, and travellers wander all night on the wild wolds, and men be missing for days in the immense marshes, in crossing which carriers would lose their way, and leave their carts fast in the deep dykes in foggy weather. In summer, harvests waved up to its very walls, and in winter the wailing of plovers might be heard, when all was still, in its ancient streets. Spots more solitary you could not find at some seasons of the year, which at others were all astir with busy out-of-door life, for the wide-spreading floods manured the lands, and the spotted heifer lowed knee-deep in the summer grass, over which the milk-maid went carolling, where in winter not a living soul could be seen, unless it were the fowler in his boat stealing along like a shadow through the willow-sheltered and reed-fringed dykes. Nothing was thought of keeping their milch cows, or horses in pastures a mile or two away from the town ; ‘exercise,’ the old folk said, ‘was good for young people, and while they were going thither they were doing nothing else ; their fathers and mothers had done it before them, and why shouldn’t they ? The further the cow from the town, the better her milk, and the walk made the lasses rosy,

and gave the young men a chance to court.' And the cattle were attended to morning and evening, so in spring and summer, in those far-away fields, and the men and maids went by woods where ghosts walked, and by lanes where women were seen in white, without heads, and by banks where blood had been shed 'in the olden time,' for so they said, and so many of them believed in our old superstitious town.





CHAPTER VIII.

OLD SHOPS, OLD HOUSES, AND OLD INHABITANTS.

As a picture of the past, and one that had never been altered for many long years, I shall now endeavour to bring before the eye the trades and shops, odd characters, and old houses, ancient lanes, yards, and 'twitchells,' in some such order as they stood, and with the old names by which the trades were

called. For a long way up the principal street nearly all the shops fronted the river—the street dividing them from the wharves and warehouses opposite—and strange-looking places were some of those passages and lanes, and ‘staithes,’ which led under and beside the warehouses to the river. Many were vaulted and almost dark, and terminated in slippery stone, or wooden steps; and accidents had happened in those spots to the townspeople who went for water to the river, and who ‘over-reached’ themselves—as the inhabitants called it—and unable to pull up the heavy pail had fallen in, and when the tide run strong had been carried far away, and their bodies remained undiscovered until found floating many days after they had been drowned. Some of these old shoemakers and tailors had sat working at the same windows for a long half century, and in fine weather these were always open, and the wooden window-sill worn bright through the number of gossips who had leant there until they had worn all the nap off their sleeves.

The first shop nearly opposite the bridge-foot, was a cobbler’s, and as a sign of his trade a pair of large boots hung on each side of his door when it was fair,

for if it began to rain he always got up and took them in; they were better than an almanac to the in-door neighbours. Years ago, some man left them with him to be repaired and had never called for them, nor ever been heard of since. The first thing of a morning he hung out his boots, and the last thing at night took them in. They had been stolen and carried away scores of times, but they always found their way back, and as the old cobbler used to say, 'always would—for the man who had worn them had two left legs.' They were as square at the toes as the shoes we see in the portraits of the period of Henry the Eighth. Next to the cobbler was a 'good-stuff' shop, as it was called—kept by an old woman, who out of sugar, treacle, and a little butter made what she called 'black jack, butter-scotch, pincushions, bulls'-eyes, cure-all:' also cakes, which she baked on buttered paper and sold the paper to which the cakes had adhered, and this the children bought and ate—paper and all.

Then came the old milk house, which had been in the same family for two centuries—it is demolished now. Beside the house were the strong weather-bleached gates which opened into the yard where the

cows were driven to be milked—and such milk! as I have said there were fields containing miles of cowslips around that Old-fashioned Town. Next was a public-house called the 'Bridge Inn,' through its nearness to the bridge ; and beyond this a row of houses with a sprinkling of little shops, not that they were originally intended for business by the class of people who formerly lived there—when instead of a bridge there was a ferry, and in place of a stone-cutter's and ship-builder's yard and a long corn-warehouse before the doors—but pleasant slopes of green, and bits of garden, which they had only to cross the street to reach, and sit in their little summer-houses to look over and on the river ; those who lived there then were dead, and the class to which they belonged had removed either 'up-town' or to the new houses that were beginning to spring up along the backway, at the foot of the hills, where the face of the country was unchanged. And in these houses, which had stood through so many changes, one old couple sold pies, &c., and to eke out a living the aged husband collected rags, old iron, bottles, or any other rubbish : he could not when he walked 'pick' his feet up, but used to slide along the pavement, pushing on first

one foot then the other, or rather putting forward what he called his best leg, then drawing the other up to nearly a level with it, and so having a 'fresh start,' and thus for years he shuffled through his daily rounds, until at last he

'Shuffled off his mortal coil.'

A door or two beyond a few second-hand garments were hung outside, and sometimes leaning over the half-door would be seen one of the ugliest faces in Our Old Town; that was the husband's. At other times you saw a countenance as remarkable for beauty as the other was for ugliness; that was the wife's—and rumour said that nowhere in the whole town could be found a happier pair. He was a merry little fellow, who doated on his pretty wife, and was proud of her beauty, taking some credit for having won her when he had so many rivals; and she used to say he would never make her jealous, that she was not afraid of anyone running away with him. His head was big enough for two men of his size, and looked as if nature for a freak had stuck a giant's head on a dwarf's body. Added to this he was deeply pitted with the small-pox, and brown as

a nutmeg, the grater of which his face resembled. He was nick-named Youth-and-Beauty, and many a roar of laughter did he raise by descanting on the advantages of ugliness. Above his door was written up 'Dealer In Old Clothes. And Leather Breeches Maker.' Leather breeches, he said, lasted for ever—they served for three or four generations, nobody ever wanted a new pair, so he was compelled to deal in second-hand clothes which wore out fast enough.

A little higher was a watchmaker, who, however, only did repairs; he was a fine portly fellow, and would smile, and nod, and squint at the lookers-on through his glass, and, if they were boys, amuse them by the droll faces he made. He was said to be a most excellent workman, and most of the country people who came over the bridge and from the villages that lay 'down toward,' trusted him with their watches. He was bass-singer at one of the chapels, and played on a bass-viol half as big as himself; he was almost always singing, and it was quite refreshing to hear his fine deep voice as you passed his window. It was said that he 'was worth a plum or two,' a common phrase in this Old Town for any one who had saved a little money. The old

jokers used to say that he run down the stairs by the wharf opposite every Saturday night, and stood up to his chin in water for several hours so as to catch a nice deep rough cold, on purpose to improve his bass for Sunday when he sang. I pass by the wine and spirit merchant's, as that was comparatively a new building.

The factory where they made corn-sacks and spun hemp, and kept flax-dressers and men and women spinners, has been closed many years, and the great noble-looking house by which the factory-yard was entered has changed its tenants so many times, that I have forgotten who lived in it since the factory was shut up and so many poor people thrown out of employment. At one time some new doctor came to the Old Town who gave advice gratis, took the large house, and lectured in the Moot-hall, and tried all he could to push himself into practice ; but, as the people said, the great house 'eat him up,' what did one man want with thirty rooms—and so he vanished. At another time, it was opened as an academy—and great globes were stuck in the windows, and circulars issued throughout the town and the neighbouring villages, with such a flourish about boarders, and

what not ; but, as the neighbours said, 'he couldn't make a do of it,' so the house was again to let. A lawyer next tried, and as he could obtain no other practice he set to and sued the landlord, and got a good round sum for giving up the key. He was the only one, they said 'who went out of it better off than he came in.' After that it was empty a long time—the landlord had no heart to let it—'it was bad enough,' he said, 'to get no rent, but worse to have a tenant to pay for living in it.' But then he used to say it might have been worse, and it was a great blessing the lawyer did not sell the house to pay costs ; he did threaten that he would.

The ever-busy tailor, with his shopboard full of sons, came next, for he brought them all up to use the goose, needle, scissors, and sleeve-board. He made and sold anything, everything, in the tailoring and slop line : from a smock-frock that covered the whole body to a 'splat' or little gaiter that only covered the instep. He stood market, and had a stall at the village feasts, wakes, and statutes—made plush waistcoats, fustian coats, and corduroy breeches and gaiters for farmers' servants, and did a great business. He was the very picture of a tailor, with

his stockings down, spectacles on, the thread and measure thrown round his neck, and his cross-legs so bent that the sides of his knees touched the board while he worked, and lay flat on it as the palm of your hand. What unmerciful dinners did he take and carry from the bakehouse! what fat joints he used to cook! A peck of potatoes was as nothing with him under a leg of mutton, which he said 'his lads could eat, bone and all.' He always called his grown-up sons 'his lads;' he had only one daughter. There was a recruiting party in the town and she fell in love with the dashing serjeant. He wanted to marry her but the tailor objected to such a match. When the reeruiting party marched out of town she marched off with the serjeant. At breakfast-time she was missed, and the tailor marched after his daughter. She was very young. Before night he brought her back, and when 'his lads' had left off work he cut a piece of strong red cloth into slips and called her into the shop. He was short-tongued. He fastened the door and began to 'lay on' with the red cloth, exclaiming at every stroke, 'Tho, thoult have a thouldier (soldier) wilt-ee; a bit of red cloth, eh! I'll thouldier thee if ti wonth to be thouldeired—

red cloth, eh? (bang) a thouldier, eh?" (whack) and so he kept laying on, while at every stroke she exclaimed, 'Yes, I will have a soldier.' And so she had, in spite of the thrashing, for the serjeant contrived to enlist one of her brothers not only into his own regiment but into his favour, and after that she had a 'thouldier.' And many a mischievous little rascal as he passed the tailor's shop, used to exclaim, 'I'll thouldier thee,' as he imitated the short-tongued tailor. There was a yard and fields behind the tailor, in which lived old 'Gatty,' who kept a day-school, and old 'Johnty' the fisherman's, and Tully, who once sung in the theatre—

'Pity kind gentlefolk—friends of humanity ;'

and who had a halfpenny thrown on the stage, on which he never appeared again.

The next was a house whose history was unknown ; gigantic Doric columns supported the front of it, under which was a wide-paved pathway, a continuation of the footway of the town. It was not a stone-cast from the river. There was no such house in the whole of that Old-fashioned Town ; it was a mystery. Through its centre run a great, lofty,

sounding archway, its front to the river, its back to the hills, measuring I know not how many yards in length, breadth, and height. It was indeed a princely habitation, though broken up and let out into numberless shops and apartments. It was a little town within itself; you would have been lost in it in ancient times. In its original state, it was said some old Danish king lived there; but that was a traditional falsehood; neither sea-king nor Saxon ever had such a roof over their heads, old although it was. No living being either knew when it was built, or when it was altered into shops, and first let off into apartments. There it stood wrapt up in all its mysterious antiquity, a silent and sealed mansion, as regarded the remote past, with the old hills rising behind, and the old river rolling before, and houses creeping up to the very knees of its gigantic columns, and covering its ancient pleasance and forgotten orchard-grounds, and rich meadows, until even many of these had become so old that their origin was lost, like that of the princely mansion which they surrounded. The four shops, two on each side of the spacious archway, darkened by the massy and overhanging colonnade, and to make

which the ground-front of the building had been defaced, I have no heart to describe ; they were a comparatively modern innovation, and it almost afforded me pleasure to know that there was a continual change of tenants. That massy edifice was never erected for business. No one stayed long there that took the shops ; and it seemed to me that the money they sunk was a just retribution for desecrating its noble rooms with traffic. Some nobleman ought to have taken it ; that archway ought to have echoed back the tramp of horses, and those wide staircases have been trod by other feet than those of lodgers, and such as lived by the letting of rooms in that baronial-looking building, into which steps and staircases had been made to almost every apartment.

On the river-side of the street, nearly opposite the large old mansion, were a public-house, a flax-dresser's shed, a sailmaker's, and a blacksmith's, then came an immense wharf, which was joined by other wharves, with a few warehouses, and here and there a dwelling-house, the backs of which overlooked the wharves, the river, and the country beyond the opposite banks ; and these extended a considerable distance, in the direction of what was called 'up-

town.' Separated from the large mansion by what was called a 'twitchell,' or narrow space, along which there was never any pathway, but which generally run between the houses that were built back to back, and into which aged cats retired to die, and where tiles fell and broke, and the rain dropped, and black moss grew, and little birds tumbled out of their nests under the eaves, and perished ; where rats ran unmolested, and made their way through into the houses ; and over which the bats always built ; and which it made you melancholy to look along, by calling up images of darkness, decay, and death—separated, at the end, from the large old mansion by a 'twitchell,' was a long, low, respectable-looking house, which had no doubt, at one period, like the gigantic neighbour by which it was overlooked, commanded an uninterrupted view of the river. It laid a little back, and had a quiet, retiring, gentlemanly look, and had, I believe, for years been inhabited by gentle people ; nor had there been any dread of a window-tax when it was built, though how old it might have been I cannot say. Then came a miller's—the father and sons were always white ; there was a clean white dusty look

about the house, and the cart, and the pet-horse. The old wooden mill which they owned was at the 'town-end,' and stood on a pillar which turned round, so that in whatever quarter the wind 'set,' the sails could be turned to catch it. It had a little field to itself, and was ascended by a wooden ladder, above which the mill-door showed like a dark hole. It was just such a mill as you see in some of those dear little Dutch pictures; with a picturesque shed for the cart and horse. The house showed no other sign of business, beyond that of a large flour-bin, which contained 'firsts, seconds, and coarse, or common,' for so were the three different kinds of flour distinguished.

A little further on lived a fellow who was in the habit of beating his wife, and I was nearly deafened one evening by a crowd blowing on bullock's-horns and beating old tin cans; and on going out to inquire what was the matter, I was told that he had again thrashed her, and that they were 'Riding the stang.' I saw a rough-looking man, seated on a chair, high above the heads of the mob; he was borne on the shoulders of half-a-dozen men, like a Guy, and was the merriest of the lot. He repeated

the rhymes which had been used on such occasions time out of mind. At length they halted before the door of the house where the man had beaten his wife, and then the deafening outcry recommenced, accompanied by the words of 'ran tan, tan a ran tan,' and the mounted speaker beating an old frying-pan at the end of every line, of which the following was the burthen—

The ran-tan chorus came in at the end of every line. And Mrs. Sage showed herself at the window, with a couple of blackened eyes, as Bunyan says, 'the same to testify.' Sage, however, did not approve of the proclamation, but made an unexpected rush out of his door, and overthrew the man who rode the stang (or poll), chair and all. He had better

have kept in, for he had no more chance than a fox hemmed in by a pack of hounds. They forced him into the chair, held him there, and bore him into the market-place in triumph, a living witness of his own shame. For petty offences the punishment was so many hours in the stocks ; and then there was but little work done for that day, as the stocks had to be brought all the way from the church-porch into the market-place ; and I do verily believe that many envied those who had to submit to such easy penance ; for the offences were so venial, that they were not looked upon as crimes at all, and the best humour prevailed on all sides ; boys or very young men were generally the pardonable culprits. The majesty of the law cut only a sorry figure on such occasions, and more than once the beadle had to run for it ; for while he was looking one way, to see from whence the rotten apples came, he was assailed from other quarters, and no one, of course, knew who were the assailants. The old town lock-up was called the 'Kit-cote,' why so I must leave to be answered by some one learned in 'Notes and Queries.' The town-crier, whose livery was a long murrey-coloured cloak, turned up with green, was

always getting into hot-water—either crying something wrong or something libellous ; for this Old Town abounded in mischievous wags, who cared nothing for the fee, so long as they had their fun. Something, to wit, was lost at the imaginary wedding of some notorious old maid or bachelor ; or some outlandish monster or another was to be seen at such-and-such a place ; and rare laughing there was at those who went on such wild-goose errands. Very often the crier miscalled houses—horses, and caused much merriment by such blunders.

A letter, which of all things is generally considered the most private, was the signal for an assembly of the whole court, or yard, the instant it was delivered. Some came in up to the elbows in flour, and others up to the elbows in suds ; one brought in her knitting, and another her sewing ; and the inquiries of ‘ Well, what is it about ?—who is it from ?—what does it say ? ’—were only looked upon as the kind interest they took in the welfare of the receiver, who very often was unable to read it—for education lagged sadly in the rear in this Old-fashioned Town. Then these poor women—consisting generally of the wives of sailors, shipwrights, labourers, and

mechanics—had their favourite letter-writer, whose charge varied from twopence to fourpence. And very amusing it was to hear the party concocting a letter—perhaps to the husband of the woman who could not write, and who had next to nothing to say, excepting—‘Thou can give my love to him, and such like, and tell him parson made a sweet discourse on Sunday, and took his text from * * * ; and that I think the pig will be fit to kill about Michaelmas: that Billy took cold while taking his medicine, but is better now; and that some never-do-well upset Nanny Cawthry’s rain-water tub last Tuesday, and didn’t leave her a drop to wash with, and it was her heavy washing-week; that the cat’s “kittled,” and I’ve saved a black-and-white one.’ Such would be about an average specimen, both as to matter, form, and style; including mention of who was married and who had died.





CHAPTER IX.

QUEER CHARACTERS IN OUR OLD TOWN.

AMONG the many queer characters in Our Old Town, was Long Tommy, as he was called by some, and Young Tominy by others, but Tommy by all. There was such a likeness between him and his father, both in look and figure, that they said it was difficult to tell the one from the other, and that at a

first glance, young Tommy looked a little the oldest of the two. They both dressed alike, wore their hats and shoes out of shape alike, and both their coats had the same 'slommaking' look. It was his boast, that he and his little neat, new-pinnish-looking wife had a hot dinner every day, and five days out of the seven it was cooked at the bakehouse. He took and fetched it himself, and a tempting little dinner it was. 'Just enough for myself, my missis, and our lass,' he used to say; 'our lass' was the servant. They never had any left for next day, never anything spoilt. The butcher knew to an ounce how much to cut him: he had it fresh every day, bought it himself, and always took the money in his hand, chinking it, all the while he was making up his mind what he should have. 'A bit of mutton to-day, Tommy?' some neighbour would say, meeting him carrying home his hot dinner. 'Yes, my lad, or my lass,' he would answer, no matter how old they might be, 'bit of mutton—nothing nicer, nothing sweeter over a few mealy kidney potatoes, or bit of light pudding, and my missis's puddings are as light as love. Always put "beestings" in when you can get 'em.' Perhaps while he thus

stood talking, with the dinner in his hand, without any cover over it, his neat new-doll-like wife would thrust her head out of the little shop door, and exclaim, ‘Come, come, Tommy, if thou stand’st talking there all day, thou’lt have that bit of dinner as cold as a stone.’—‘I’ll be with thee in a minute, my lass,’ he would reply; ‘I was only telling our neighbour here what a fine thing beestings is for puddings.’ And Tommy would hurry on, looking lovingly on his pound-and-a-half of meat, and more lovingly on his little pudding, if it chanced to be made of beestings, or breastings, as the first milk was called which a cow yielded after calving.

Tommy and his neighbour’s wife’s mother were great gossips; her daughter had had nineteen children, and she had nursed them all, had taught them all to walk. Half her life seemed to have been spent in stooping and teaching children to walk on the sunny bit of pavement that extended from the corner of her son-in-law’s shop to where the public-house projected out, and made a sharp angle in the causeway, four doors beyond. Every crevice in that morsel of footway was familiar to her eye. She had paced it over slowly while stooping and watching each

succession of feet countless thousands of times, for but few of her grandchildren had died very young. No children had ever run so soon as those she had nursed. This one could bear its own weight at so many months, and that one could go by holding by the chairs, and the other by only holding one of her fingers ; all of which it made her happy to tell, and in good-natured Tommy she found the kindest and most patient of listeners.

I often thought what a trying and wearisome life that woman must have had, when, after bringing up a family of her own, and having seen her sons and daughters grow up to men and women, she had, as it were, to turn back to her younger years, and to exercise afresh that patience which requires strength of body as well as mind to support it, amid all the wear and tear which she had to undergo, while surrounded by such a number of clamorous children. Yet she bore all bravely, and without ever murmuring, and would often say, ‘ Whatever would my daughter have done ? she had had no experience with children. It’s a blessing I am strong enough to do my duty to them.’ And she did her duty well, ably, willingly, and cheerfully.

Adjoining Long Tommy was a shoemaker with a large family. His sons helped him to make shoes, and his daughters bound them ; they were always as busy as bees. The family were methodists, and very religious, and, excepting that he was darker, the father reminded me very much of the founder of his sect, having much of that pious, dreamy look which I always fancy may be traced in the portrait of Wesley. His daughters, who were grown up young women, always wore black hose and ankle-straps to their shoes, which fastened at the front with a button. When his children did wrong he chastised them without a look, and I believe almost without a feeling of anger. I often fancied Cromwell must have had many such men amongst his Ironsides, who sabred and pistolled the Royalists, with 'The Lord have mercy on thee—duty forbids me to show thee any, though I am deeply grieved to be under the painful necessity of stabbing thee under the fifth rib.' His house was hung with portraits of methodist preachers, little oval engravings, and most of them side views, as if done for cheapness. He took in all the ' Methodist Magazines,' and scarcely read himself, or allowed his family to read anything but

Methodist works. Hence, although a most pious man, his mind was narrowed, his views limited, and his charity to others, of a different denomination, very circumscribed. But he made capital shoes, and would lend anybody his books, and it gave him great delight if he could get any one to read Macgowan's 'Dialogue of Devils.' The lights and shadows of his character were strongly contrasted.

Next door to him was a little butcher's shop, then a public-house, the landlord of which often thrashed his wife, for she had a most aggravating tongue, and he a fiery temper. She often served at the bar with a pair of blacked eyes, as she said, to 'disgrace him ;' and when any customers came in whom she knew, she would say, ' You see what my brute of a husband's done at me.' She reminded me of Chaucer's ' Wife of Bath,' and would have the last word. After quarrelling with his wife, he would go and employ himself all day in his fields, never coming home to dinner ; so that she used to console herself by saying ' If I suffer one way, he does another.' When he returned at night, she would say, ' Well, brute, I'm alive yet to torture you a little longer. I hoped you would never come back again.

But there's no good luck for me yet.' To which he would reply, 'That wish is one towards a new score, which you'll have to pay off some day, as sure as your name's Nancy.' And so they went on until they had another reckoning, or, as he said, when any one named it, 'Me and my missis have been settling old scores.' But as some of the customers said, she fought him, 'ay, and fought well, too,' and that on more than one occasion he had been compelled to run for it. She once locked him up in the brew-house for two days, and it was said he ate a peck of ground malt in the time, for she neither gave him 'bite nor sup,' and that he got out by breaking a hole through the roof. He used to talk about it, and end by saying, 'And when I got out, didn't I give it her?' If she heard him, she would exclaim, 'We'll cry quits on that score, Bill, and put beside it what I gave you when you got drunk, and I tied you down to the four bed-posts.' They were well matched, and it was only now and then that he had the best of it. When she had no quarrel with him she led her servants a sad life. A peaceable husband would have left her, and in her candid moments she said so, often finishing with, 'I dare say I deserve all

he gives me, and a good deal more, if the truth were known.’ Still they both attended to business, and were fond of their children, and as he said, ‘that saved her many a blow, for she was always the hardest mouthed when she had one of them on her knee, as she knew he never settled her hash then.’ Peace rest with them ; they often fought, and from my heart I believe they both liked it occasionally—that a quarrel was to them as wholesome as the wind is to stagnant water. Though it is not an agreeable task to paint such portraits, yet they made up the great family of Our Old Town ; who fell out and fell in again, and never troubled either constable or magistrate.

There was one woman, who lived near this quarrelsome couple, and whenever she went by the sailor’s wives said to one another, either ‘There comes, or there goes bonnet,’ though not loud enough for her, on whom the remark was passed, to hear it. I soon learnt that the woman was the wife of a captain, and that during one of the voyages, she went with her husband, his vessel struck upon a sand, and was abandoned by all hands, who escaped without taking anything from the ship, the keel of

which they expected every moment to be driven in, for the shock, as one of the men on board said, 'was like throwing a house out of the windows into the street.' As it was in the night when the vessel struck, those who were in their berths, and among these were the captain and his wife, were hurried into the boat without time even to take their clothes, as the sea was rushing into the cabin. The captain was unwilling to give up the ship altogether, so fastened a long rope to the boat and rowed off until it all ran out, when, after pitching and tossing for some time in the rain and darkness, the rope snapped, and they were compelled to row for the shore, where they were fortunate enough to find a solitary fisherman's hut. The wet blanket, the only covering in which the captain's wife escaped, was thrown aside, and into such a bed as the hut afforded she was placed, where she soon fell asleep. At daylight, after many attempts, the captain and two or three of his men succeeded in regaining the vessel, which was already boarded by the crews of several fishing-smacks, or 'sea-sharks,' as my informant called them. They of course refused to give her up, as they found no one on board. They,

however, allowed the sailors to take their clothes, also those belonging to the captain’s wife. They even invited the unfortunate captain and his men to breakfast off his own sea-stores, which they now claimed as their own ; and pretty free they made with everything. They threw overboard enough of the cargo to allow the vessel to float off the sand at high water, and she was doomed afterwards for the salvage. The captain and his men returned, and the mate was the first to enter the hut, shouldering the heavy trunk which contained the wearing apparel that belonged to the captain’s wife. She raised her head and looked up when he told her what he had brought, and in whose hands he had left the ship. The only reply she made was, ‘Oh, the wretches, they’ll never prosper, they’ve kept my best bonnet.’ ‘And so we lost the ship,’ added the narrator, ‘but if I’d known what would have happened, I would never have tarred the bulkhead that day.’

They had an old saying in this place, which they often used while eating their bread-and-cheese, and which was, ‘A careful man scrapes his cheese-crust, a wasteful man cuts it off and throws it away, and a dirty man eats it—dirt, crust, and all.’

The real gentlemen and ladies, in this Old-fashioned Town, according to the fashionable or Court Guide classification, were very few indeed. This was a retired wharfinger, that an independent doctor, the other a lawyer who had enough to live on, a fourth an officer who had long been past service, a fifth a wealthy old wine-merchant who had abandoned business, a sixth a deaf old naval captain, who it was said lost his hearing through the firing of cannon when he fought under Nelson ; and so might the list be filled up, for with a few similar exceptions the remainder were, or had been, connected with business. Not but what there were pleasant parks and memorable mansions, and titled families enough a few miles away, but none of them lived in the Old Town, nor, as far as I could gather, had they done for centuries. But there were huge old rambling houses in the place, which told a tale in their defaced armorial bearings, of once famous names, that had faded from the mind, and that could only now be found among the things that were ; houses that had overlooked the river, when their gardens went sloping down to the water-edge, where the thronged wharves now go bulging out. You looked on them, and were carried back to

other days—to another England that seems not like what we now inhabit, excepting in a few such places as this Old-fashioned Town. On some of the wings of these ancient buildings there were sundials, bearing dates which told that time was not measured then, as now, by such mechanical apparatus as are carried in the pocket, but that their clock was the sun, and their dial a portion of the enduring building. You turned to the days when the chief cook ‘thumped thrice’ on the huge oaken dresser, as a signal that dinner was ready to be served up. Not that the living past had wholly vanished at the period of which I am writing, it was only the very remote that had wholly perished, in its breathing form. The three-cornered cocked-hat and the three-tiered wig, the broad shoe-buckles and the long-lapped waistcoat, with coats cut in the style of George the Second, were still worn by a few of the old-fashioned inhabitants of this Old-fashioned Town. There were marks of the touch of time, and the decay of death upon it, but it was too enduring to be wholly obliterated—too imperishable to leave not ‘a wrack behind.’ Contented old town! where that man was pointed out as somebody far beyond the

common order who received a salary of one guinea per week ; where five pounds a year was looked at as a great rent for a hard-working man ; and where the majority of the houses consisted of only two rooms—that which was called ‘the house,’ a down-stairs apartment, and the chamber ; and in which so many lived happy and contented, though in the humblest way, for they contrived to keep out of debt on an income of some twelve or fourteen shillings a week. Even the little black man who went out with an emblematical bottle of ink by his side, and a bundle of rushes with which he repaired or bottomed chairs, contrived to live and be respected, ‘nigger’ though he was, and slave as he had been. For truthfulness, kindness, and piety, he was the ‘Uncle Tom’ of nature’s pure old school, and although black as a dark bull’s hide, beloved by everybody. He, too, loved everything and everybody, from a child to an ugly dog. I have seen him carefully pick up a worm, and carry it to where the earth was soft and easy of penetration ; he was not content with not treading on it, but as he placed it on the ground would say, ‘Poor dumb thing ! that God who made me made it to live its time, and

he made me to live no longer.' Nobody had more hearty shakes of the hand than 'little black Tommy,' as he was called even by the children. He was so little that the smallest child that could run could reach up to shake his honest black hand, for few hands were so properly and truly honest. He knew that his last and eternal resting-place was not within the limits of that Old-fashioned Town ; and while he looked to the promised land far beyond, it seemed to afford him happiness to clasp the warm hands of those whom he knew not how soon he might be called upon to leave behind. The statue of that little black man, with his ink-bottle by his side, and his bundle of rushes projecting far out below and above his shoulders, would be an ornament to the statueless market-place of Our Old Town.





CHAPTER X.

QUEER CHARACTERS IN OUR OLD TOWN.

ANOTHER of the oddities of Our Old Town was old Johnty, a man who tried all he could to become religious, but got beaten, as he used to say, through the devil tempting him in the shape of drink. Once he restrained from it a whole twelvemonth, joined the Baptists, and got 'dipped'; but he soon

broke out after the immersion, and had a whole week of it; then he repented, and begged and prayed to be dipped again to make him all right. But Johnty was never again admitted into the society until a few months before he died. After one of his 'drunken bouts,' he would retire into the deepest solitudes of the woods above the town, and there he has been found on his knees by the gamekeepers. And too many, who had no respect for religion, tempted him with drink, thinking, no doubt, in their little-mindedness, that by getting him inebriated they achieved a triumph over the sect his misconduct disgraced. Yet Johnty was sincere in his repentance, and for weeks after he would work early and late, drink nothing but water, and put double as much in the poor-box as he had spent at his last 'break out.' Sometimes, in his drunken moods, he would, while staggering through the streets, begin singing a hymn, first giving out the words, while all the children in the neighbourhood followed at his heels. Or he would sit down and argue with himself in some such way as, 'Johnty, why do you get drunk? Because the devil tempts me. Why do you give way to his temptations? Because I am weak

and he's strong. But if you resisted him he would fly. So he would, but only to watch his next opportunity, and be on to me again the first time he caught me off my guard. But you know how wrong it is to yield to him. I do, but he over-persuades me, says that a gill or two will do me good, and then gets me on to a gallon. But, knowing this, and having been deceived by him so many times, why do you still continue to yield to him? It's the smell of the brewhouses does it. I get to thinking about what a capital brewing that must be; and it comes so often into my head that he at last puts it there altogether, and then he has me.' Sometimes he would inflict a penance on himself, and go without shoes or stockings in the coldest days in winter, and as he was a shipwright, and had to work in the open air, his feet got frost-bitten, and he was a great sufferer through this voluntary mortification. In the night he would have imaginary encounters with the Evil One, leap out of bed and challenge him to come nearer, complain that he took advantage of his lying down, and dare not stand before him fairly. There was a rumour of King, the butcher, whom Johnnty had often disturbed by these midnight

combats, getting up, throwing a bullock's skin over himself, and representing his hoofed and horned highness of darkness, and that the butcher came off with the worst of it, was compelled to make himself known, and roar aloud for assistance ; that the shipwright refused to believe, said he was known to be the father of lies, and continued the beating until help came to the rescue of the butcher, who confessed that he was cured of playing the part of the devil.

Old Trippet was as renowned for eating as Johnty was for drinking. Whatever he was going to have for dinner he went round to let his neighbours know the moment he had swallowed his breakfast. He would commence with the draper next door, and then go the whole round of the market-place, beginning with, 'Good morning, Mr. Downs ; a fine morning, Mr. Downs. I'm going to have a calf's head for dinner to-day, Mr. Downs. I'm very fond of calf's head, Mr. Downs. I have the tongue cut small and mashed up with the brains, and I can assure you it's delicious, Mr. Downs. I wish it were ready. Good morning, Mr. Downs.' And, wiping his mouth, and making a noise with his lips,

as if he were already enjoying it, he would go into the next shop, repeat the same words, and so keep on for some hour or so, and then return home. The instant he entered his parlour he would ring the bell for cook, and when she entered, inquire if the calf's head, or whatever it might be, was on, or down, finishing with, 'See and do it nicely, cook; it's one of my favourite dishes.' He would then sit down and look at the fire, or, perhaps, stand at the window for about half an hour, then ring the bell again for cook, and inquire how the calf's head was going on, and what sort of a fire she had got, and so on for every half hour, until dinner was served up. Then he would eat until the perspiration streamed off him, leave off and take a few turns up and down the room, and then 'at it' again. One day he had a fine sappy green goose for dinner. He ate it all up, stuffing and all. It was too much for him. The cook said 'he led her such a dance that she was compelled to serve it up before it was done.' That was his last dinner. He confessed to the doctor that he had indulged a little too much: then added that such pleasure was not dearly purchased by the enduring of a little pain; that he did not mind

being under his hands for a few weeks longer than usual, providing he might now and then take a little of—and he began to enumerate his favourite dishes, but expired before he had run over the whole bill of fare. He was spared much pain, for the greatest suffering he could have endured would have been the withdrawal of his dainty dishes, and the low diet he would have been limited to had he survived.

What a contrast to Trippet was Pashley the potter, who cared not what he ate or drank, so long as he could but save money. How ever the man carried the loads on his head for miles into the country that he carried, was the wonder of all who beheld him. He said ‘it was use,’ and no doubt there was a great deal in that, for, summer or winter, rain or fine, he went out every day, excepting on market-day and Sunday. If, late at night, when all the streets were still, and most of the inhabitants in bed, the tramp of heavily nailed shoes was heard, and the dragging of weary feet, any one had inquired, ‘Who’s that out so late?’ the answer would have been, ‘Only Pashley the potter; this is one of his thirty mile days.’ He carried his provisions for the day in a little recess, which he called his cupboard,

at the bottom of his basket. He drank nothing stronger than water or milk, unless a cup of tea was pressed upon him. It was a rule with him never to put his hand in his pocket to spend a penny upon himself while he was out. To the amazement of all he one evening brought home a wife. How he found time to court, or where he got married, was for a long time a puzzle to many, though it all came out afterwards. She entered the town hanging on his arm, while he carried the basket on his head as usual ; but instead of being empty, as it generally was when he returned, it was piled up with plaited straw, such as is used in the manufacturing of bonnets. Her step was like a fawn's compared with his heavy-nailed tramp. She was a pretty modest creature, and how such a rough weather-stained fellow had won her for a bride furnished matter of wonderment for days. They opened a little shop, and the first day there was a notice in the window that an apprentice was wanted to the bonnet-making. He still went out every morning with his load of pots, losing but one day after he was married, and then he was busy from daylight to dark putting up fixtures in his shop. After this, when he came

home of a night, he 'blocked' the bonnets on a wooden horse with a heavy iron. His wife soon had half-a-dozen apprentices, a window full of bonnets, and a stall in the market. Leghorns came into fashion, and Pashley met a knowing man somewhere, who had an old embossing machine to sell, and with it they stamped some preparation that felt like paper into so close an imitation of the expensive Leghorn, that the difference could only be discovered in the handling of the material. He was the only man in that Old-fashioned Town who ever, as they said, 'coined money.' In two summers he cleared several hundred pounds by this imitation. He took one of the largest shops in the market-place, devoted one side to the bonnet and the other to the pot business, and though he could scarcely sign his name, became one of the wealthiest men in the town. To the last he wore knee corduroys, dark-grey worsted stockings, and nailed shoes, and his hat slouched over his eyes as when it was weighed down with a load of pots. He also retained the same measured swinging gait as that which prevented the brittle ware from breaking when he strode miles into the country with his basket. A till he never

used, but carried the money he took during the day loose in his pockets, as he had always done whilst hawking his ware. When he had no customers to serve he either walked up and down his shop, or at the front of it, in his old travelling attitude ; and for years after he had given up hawking, he would put up his hands to his head, as if to lift down his basket of pots, when a customer entered.

But while Pashley was really rich, the old iron-monger at the corner was reputed to be so ; and into the hands of the latter, many persons in this Old-fashioned Town intrusted their money. With him it was considered safer than with the bank. They demanded no acknowledgment, an entry in his old red iron-moulded book was sufficient ; so long as it was in his hands, that was all they required. He was such a pious man too, and took so prominent a part in all that concerned the interest of the great Dissenting chapel. He bought land by the hundred acres together, he built a new village where a house had never before been seen. People clamoured to become his tenants. He had an only daughter, she married a country squire, and he gave her all the land and the new village for a marriage portion.

They said he had chests of ‘unsummed treasure.’ Pashley walked up and down in his old humming manner, looked across at the ironmonger’s shop, and saw the people rush in with their little savings, then ‘hum, hummed’ to himself, walked faster, then paused again; and when asked by some one, (who began to doubt,) what he thought of affairs at the corner, said, ‘I’ll tell you what it is—hum, hum, hum,’ (the noise of the pots seemed ever to be ringing in his head). ‘It’s all hum, hum, very well for those who like it; but the pattern don’t suit me—don’t like the colour of the clay, baked too quick, cracked, smashed—all hum—hum—humbug, and so you’ll see.’ What Pashley said, soon reached the ironmonger’s ears, and he came across to demand an explanation. Pashley called his wife, bid her write out a cheque—hum, humming all the while—affixed his own unsightly signature to it, (it was on the county bank,) then asked the old ironmonger to cash him that. He declined. Pashley put it in his pocket, and went humming up and down, as if with his pots in his head, without saying a word.

It was the talk of the town; some said the cheque was for one thousand pounds, some for ten,

and others for twenty. There was a rush at the ironmonger's on the following morning; by noon the shop was closed: by night the old man was found hanging from a beam in his iron warehouse, dead as Judas. All he had left, excepting the estate he had made over to his daughter on her marriage—and that could not be touched—was not sufficient to pay a shilling in the pound of what he owed, and was entrusted with. Scarcely one had a legal claim at all upon what the stock produced—only a portion of one of the covers of the coveted iron-moulded book was found under the grate, the rest was consumed by the fire, and his ‘unsummed treasures’ were the piles of old iron he had bought, and which lay rusting in heaps in the cellar. Pashley did not carry his pots steadily for days after this disaster; but amid his hum, humming, ever kept shaking his head; he would certainly have smashed them, had they been upon it in his basket, as they were wont to be in former years. Pashley bought the shop and stock, placed a young man in it who had married his daughter; went humming in now and then, to see how they got on; then died, leaving them the possessors of thousands.

He was the only one, as the inhabitants still say, 'who ever made money as fast as he could count it,' in Our slow-moving dreamy Old Town. He never gave away a sixpence in his life, nor owed any man a shilling. Still, as they said, he was a better man than the old ironmonger. And that was the best they said of him. A dry, dirty, bread-crust was found in his coat-pocket when he died; he had fished it up out of the 'swill tub,' that very afternoon, and intended lecturing the servant, who had thrown it into the pig-wash, on her wasteful habits; but it chanced to be her 'day out,' so she only heard of the 'blowing up' she was to have had from the housekeeper, for his wife had long been dead. They say he complained of the weight of pots he felt on his head before he expired, and that when he found the doctor could not take it off, he went on hum, hum, humming, fainter and fainter as if with the pots ringing in his brain, until death helped him down with his burthen, on the silent threshold of another world.

To show how reluctant the inhabitants of Our Old Town were to improve or alter, the whole place was in a complete ferment one day through the

starting of an opposition coach, to run to the next market-town. It appeared that the landlord of the Black Hart had quarreled with the host of the Black Boy, and the latter resolved to start a coach and display the often coveted name of 'coaching-office,' as well as the Boniface of the Black Hart, which had always been considered as the head inn. Now the two hosts happened to be on the same leet jury, and somehow or another, words arose between them ; the Black Boy accusing the Black Hart 'of making too much fuss' about his coach, and coming out to look at his horses—feeling them, and pretending to understand them, and asking the hostler no end of silly questions about this near and that off-sider ; especially if there happened to be a 'featish' load, when all the while he understood no more about horses than the man in the moon, and that if he—the host of the Black Boy—chose he could start a coach as well as somebody that he knew, and who carried his head so high that he thought everybody beneath him. On hearing this the Black Hart threatened to run him off the road, and shut up his house in 'less than no time,' by carrying passengers for half the fare he then charged. Now as the leet

jury chanced to consist pretty equally of Black Hartites and Black Boyites, and as on more than one occasion each party had for a few weeks changed their houses, through one of the hosts refusing to serve any more grog after eleven o'clock and the other not setting out what was thought to be 'the thing,' in the shape of 'mulled ale, and spice-cake,' on a Christmas Eve; and as each host did in the long run hope to carry off the other's 'parlour-custom,' the feeling ran pretty deep on both sides, and there was very near being a bet of one hundred pounds between the two landlords, five of which was to have been spent in a dinner; but somehow neither the dinner nor the bet 'came off,' though the coach did, and a pretty stir it made. The Black Boy displayed a blue flag on the occasion; the Black Hart issued large posting bills, beginning with, 'In consequence of the infamous attempt of an individual, whose name the present—a respectable old established coach proprietor—would not pollute his lips with mentioning, the fares will be reduced, etc., etc.' As both inns were near the market-place, and commanded a view of each other, so were the contending parties and their adherents both visible

at the same time; and each drew up apart like opposing armies before a battle. The up-towners, with a few exceptions, were for the Black Hart, the down-towners, to a man, stood up for the Black Boy. Prior to starting, a few glasses of wine were handed about among the friends of the host of the Black Hart, while at the front of the Black Boy jugs of ale were carried round for any one who chose to drink; the former carried off the palm in proud contempt and respectability, the latter in noise, numbers, and, amongst the poorer classes, popularity. Cheetham, who was in the yeoman cavalry band, and who it was said had long 'cast sheep's eyes,' on the pretty barmaid at the Black Boy, mounted the box beside the coachman, and began playing on his key bugle, 'See the Conquering Hero comes,' to the tune of which the two horses shot round the corner, amid the loud huzzas of the Black Boyites. Now the Black Hart had a fine inn-yard, which the Black Boy had not, so that the coach had to be brought round to the front. It had, however, no sooner started than the old coach, newly decorated, came dashing out of the Black Hart archway with four horses! Such a thing was never before heard

of in that Old-fashioned Town—four horses!!! The Black Boyites stood dumb with amazement, and they said that the landlord was confined to his bed for a week.

Somehow the Old Town managed to support the two coaches at reduced fares, though not at quite the low charge first made when the opposition started. The landlords, to appearance, became friends, though many preliminary matters had to be arranged before a meeting took place ; but they did meet, however, at last—made a little advance in the fares, and then all went on smoothly enough afterwards.

And the inhabitants still lived by one another, as they had done for long centuries, consuming what they manufactured amongst themselves and the adjoining villages. He who dealt in wool sold broad cloth, which he no doubt received in exchange ; and with the exception of silks and cottons, and a few foreign articles, they seemed to me to make everything they required. Spinning-wheels were as plentiful in the market as eggs, flax-dressers flourished in the place, and there was no end of old linen-looms in the bye lanes, and of little bleachers

by the brooks. Flax was in steep everywhere. If you knew the tanner, he would dress you a hide with his own hands, and see it brought home to you in the shape of boots, without ever for a moment losing sight of it, if he promised to do so. Did you want cutlery, there was the maker himself direct from Sheffield, proud and ever ready to show you over his manufactory ; but he frequently received parcels from the above-named town, though he had a forge and worked at it (when he was not in the parlour of the 'White Lamb'). I can swear having seen him at the bellows with his coat off. Cradles they made—for the river-banks were forested with osiers ; houses they built everywhere ; timber was plentiful, so they had not to go far for coffins ; thus at their very doors almost they found the beginning, the middle, and the end. One night at the 'White Lamb,' Primer the printer, who was famous for his poetry in the limited circle of young ladies' albums (which his brother the binder and stationer made and sold), called Callard the basket-manufacturer, Chariot-maker to the Innocents, and Callard, who was a celebrated cradle-maker, was so pleased at the printer's poetical compliment, that he

said he would have it on his sign. So he had, and Pain the painter (also a 'White Lambite') put upon the sign both the cradle and the lettering. The landlady of the 'Lamb's' blessed baby 'laid' for the likeness in the cradle. Callard stood a bit of dinner next day at the 'Lamb,' and they all said that the baby's likeness (whose health they drank in bumpers upstanding) was like life. This is a fair specimen of the way in which they contrived to make everything comfortable, as they called it, amongst themselves. The 'United Tradesmen' often had either a 'snack' or a bit of dinner at the 'White Lamb.' Not a man amongst the lot 'banked;' Downs the draper once did, but they so clearly convinced him that the firm was not to be depended upon, that he drew all out on the following day, and, in gratitude for the advice, stood a 'bit of dinner.' If the 'White Lambites,' were not home at a reasonable time, their wives came for them with a 'Is our Barnes, or our Downs here; if he is, please to tell him it's high time he was at home.' Ten or half past was the respectable hour in our old-fashioned country town. When they did 'indulge' there must be a cause for it which

met with the approbation of their wives. Another class—and this by far the most numerous—never indulged at all ; but saved every shilling they got : after years and years of patient economy, and unabated industry, a few of these managed to purchase a house or two, or put away two or three hundreds in the bank ; for there was no means of making money rapidly in this dreamy Old Town. As for extending its trade, such a thought was never yet entertained, excepting by attending some neighbouring fair, or now and then visiting some adjoining market. The most speculative portion of the population were the few hawkers, who made their calls in the surrounding villages, where they had what they called their regular customers. But two carriages were kept in the whole place, and these were rarely used ; one belonged to a wealthy lawyer, who did all the town business—and had the letting of all the leases, and holding of courts with odd names ; and which his forefathers had managed for above two centuries. The carriage was only used once a year, when he went to some watering-place. The other belonged to the physician, who was looked up to as the greatest person in this Old-fashioned

Town. To him high and low bowed and curtsied. The lawyer was short and stout, and wore his hair gathered into a club. The physician tall and thin, and he wore a long pig-tail, which was ever on the move. Next in importance to these were the vicar, magistrate, and chief-constable. But for wealth, the corn-merchant, wine-merchant, shipwright, ship-owner, millwright, head wharfinger and banker, stood conspicuous. If a subscription was ever raised—which was not very common—what these had put their names down for, was all the talk of the place for days. True, there were the quiet Quakers, very charitable and no doubt rich; also the owners of the great oil-mill, and the large grocer, beside the head butcher, and the head innkeeper; these came out now and then, and oh, what talk! It was wonderful how the townspeople came by their information; but if they were to be believed, they knew what all these were worth, and many a long argument the subject led to. Those who were really the likeliest to know—said nothing. As for the rest, they must and they did talk.

Serjeant Mammocks was another marked character in Our Old Town, and would hold long arguments as

to whether the army or the navy had rendered the greatest service to the country. How freshly the figure of that fine tall, clean, upright old serjeant rises before me, with the lower part of his cheeks 'bagging' over his high hard military stock ; his raising the hand while saluting any one he knew in the true military style ; also the way in which he carried his walking-cane, the head at an angle under his arm, and the point lowered into his hand as he was wont to carry his sabre ; while his chest swelled out like a pigeon's. Then those high iron-heeled boots—he never could have marched as he did but for the noise the 'tips' made ; many who looked at him,

'Trembled to think of the blood he had shed.'

A most happy man was he, when two or three young gentlemen in the town, who had joined the yeomanry cavalry, engaged him to teach them their sword-exercise. Ah ! you should have seen him then, in the field at the end of the town 'cutting fives and sixes' by the million, as he exclaimed, 'Guard, sir ! By Jove, I should have taken your head clean off ! That stroke would have severed your

arm from your body. There, I should have run you through the heart, sir, and you would have been a dead man. A man who knows how to use his sword, sir, is safer behind it, than if his whole body was cased in proof-steel. It covers him every way, everywhere.' And they believed him, until a lounging, 'shammocking,' bit of a dragoon chap came over on furlough, and saw the serjeant do his sword-exercise ; then tried a turn or two with him, and without inflicting a wound, saving to the serjeant's pride, showed all the lookers on how he could take off his legs first, then his arms, then his head, and, by way of a finish, run him through the heart ; all of which he did to everybody's satisfaction, but the serjeant's, who insisted upon a second trial in white dresses, and with blackened sticks, which was agreed to. Alas ! the serjeant came off spotted in some places like a leopard, and striped in others like a tiger, while the 'shammocking' fellow that was on furlough came off without a mark. He was too young and nimble for the old trooper, and while the latter was cutting 'five and nine,' in the old-fashioned way, he spun his foil round like a wheel, until it looked like fifty all at once in motion. A

few months after this the fine old serjeant began to stoop in his walk, and as the townspeople said, 'to break very fast.' He never held his head up afterwards, as he had done aforetime. The old serjeant was a Tory hip and thigh, his drunken lodger, who was a tailor by trade, was a 'Tom Paineist,' back and edge, and how the two managed to live together under the same roof without flying at each other's throats, was unaccountable. They often got to angry words, sometimes almost to blows; and when such had been the case, the radical tailor next morning, would be seen with his sleeve-board under his arm, and 'goose' in his hand, on his way to new lodgings, which was always at the same little widow's; who when he came in only said, 'What, another frash! (row): I wonder how many this makes?' 'No, that was the last, he would never go back again; no never.' Yet he and the serjeant always managed to meet a night or two after in the Black Boy parlour, and to have the same argument over again; and somehow the company managed to show that they were both right, and they were always sure to go home arm-in-arm together, for on such occasions the

little tailor required supporting. And when quiet stay-at-home people, who were in bed perhaps, heard him exclaiming ‘Hurrah! Tom Paine for ever,’ they would say, ‘Yonder goes that little Radical tailor, drunk as usual.’ The general tenour of his arguments was, ‘Who made the first king? What was his grandfather? Whose land was that on which this floor is laid when there was no such thing as property? How is it one man’s so poor and another so rich? Why have I to work hard and Squire Neversweat never to do a hand stir? Who does all the churches belong to? What would the Duke of Dothembrown have, if every man had his share?’ And all these questions he would put with a stamp of his tankard on the table, and a ‘do you mean to tell me sir’ sort of way, that caused the frequenters of the parlour to say one to another, ‘There’s no getting over that—he’s a cute chap—there’s a good deal in him, if one could but understand it all,’ and so on, until the little tailor got on his legs, and then, oh dear! he began long before the Deluge, and came down—drunk;—and had to be helped home by the serjeant. As the wind sweetens the water, and the heaving stones prevent it from

stagnating, so the little tailor seemed to act on the calm surface of the serjeant—they were never easy but when they came in fierce contact, nor ever happy if they were long separated. But their bickerings have long since ceased, and they now sleep side by side, amid the quiet green of that old churchyard, which is skirted on the north and west by orchards and garden grounds, that run over the now dry moat, which once formed the watery barrier before the old wall; for there was but one burial-ground in that Old-fashioned Town; one spot to which the dead had been borne, through all the changes of long centuries. Many of the grey old sunken monuments have neither borne name nor date for ages; antiquity itself has forgotten the period of their obliteration, and nowhere has time kept a record of the names of the dead over which they were reared. The grass that has greened hundreds of departed summers, has shed its seed and died, and new shoots have sprung up on the accumulating earth, heaped over vaults, whose entrances are now unknown.





CHAPTER XI.

OLD CUSTOMS, SUPERSTITIONS, AND OLD-FASHIONED PEOPLE.

THE twenty-ninth of May was kept as a holiday in this Old-fashioned Town, and many of the houses were on that day decorated with boughs of oak, and garlands formed of flowers and ribbons, and strings of blown bird's eggs of every description that were

found in the fields and woods around the neighbourhood. It was a pretty sight, to see the great green branches projecting from the doors and windows of so many houses, and the garlands suspended from on high, and hanging over the centre of the streets, while groups of happy boys assembled below, and kept up a deafening and incessant din, by blowing their bullocks' horns. The bright colours of the garlands, and the green of the oaken boughs, made the sombre-looking old houses stand out, and formed beautiful masses of colouring, as the foliage broke the brown background, or softened the shadows under the dark overhanging gables, while the blue and yellow and crimson of the garlands, made agreeable resting-places for the eye, as, at irregular intervals, they dotted the distance. It was called Oak-apple Day, and was no doubt kept in commemoration of the escape of Charles the Second. May-poles were standing in two or three of the villages very near to this Old-fashioned Town, and at the time of which I am writing it was still customary to keep up the ancient May-games. On St. Thomas's day the old women went out 'mumping,' and received a groat in one place, and a loaf in another, from some

charity founded for the purpose centuries ago, beside what they collected at the houses of the neighbouring gentry. Plough Monday was also another holiday, when the farm-servants came into the town decorated with ribbons, and dragging a plough, while they repeated some old doggerel verses, and collected what they could amongst the inhabitants. One of the ploughmen wore a woman's gown, bonnet and cap, and generally carried the money-box ; formerly they would plough up the ground before the doors of those who refused to give them money, but latterly they have abandoned such an annoying and injurious custom. Every house burnt its Yule-log on Christmas-eve, and some saved a portion of the previous year's log, with which they kindled the new one.

Some of the old superstitious inhabitants believed that the spirits of all who were to die on the following year went in and out of the church on St. Mark's eve, and that if any one watched in the church-porch, the shadowy resemblances might be seen, as each appeared in its own living likeness. Every ancient building and dark old entry was, according to their account, haunted by some evil 'bar-

gheist,' or ghost, as some of them called it, though the older was the commoner word.

Harvest-homes, and sheep-shearing feasts, were kept up everywhere around and on the skirts of Our Old Town. The schools had, also, what was called their 'potation-feasts;' while a tea-drinking, followed by dancing, they termed a 'tutting.' I have preserved these old names, because I have never heard them in any other part of England. They also called luncheon 'Andrew,' and it was common when employed in the fields for some one to inquire if it was not 'Andrew-time.' Below many of the doors of the old houses, on the threshold or 'groundsill,' as it was called, after its original Saxon name, a horse-shoe was nailed to keep out the witch, as it was believed that neither wizard nor 'wicca' could cross a threshold to which such a charm was affixed: some of them carried a small portion of the rowan-tree, or mountain-ash, in their pockets to prevent them from being bewitched. If they made any mistake through inattention, or forgetfulness, it was a common expression to say, 'I must be bewitched,' a term they also applied to anything they had had mislaid, or lost. They had an old

saw about magpies, which ran, 'One for sorrow, two for good luck, three for a wedding, and four for death.' If they heard a dog howl in the night, they believed that some one in the neighbourhood was sure to die. They traced winding-sheets, good tidings, and sad disasters, in the burning of candles; and in the forms of cinders that leaped from the fire, found tokens of purses, cradles, and coffins. They believed that moles on different parts of the body had a true signification. There was also a small bright bronze-coloured beetle, which they called a 'sun-clock,' and which if they killed purposely, they said would cause fine weather to change to rain. They never considered that it would be a thorough rainy day, while they could see as much blue in the sky 'as would make a pair of breeches.' To meet a person that squinted the first thing of a morning was considered unlucky, the same to hear the cuckoo sing for the first time in spring and have no money in the pocket. The boys and girls confirmed anything, when there was a doubt, by 'ringing fingers,' that was by each twining together the little fingers, and repeating some old couplet that began with 'ring fingers blue-bell,' and ended with

stating, that if what they said was not true—they wished the bad man might convey them to the ‘bad place,’ ‘at twelve o’clock at night.’ These, and hundreds of other similar superstitions had come down to them from a remote period, and their origin is lost in the darkness of antiquity. Traces of some of them may be found in the Saxon superstitions, and which, no doubt, had existed amongst them, before they were converted from heathenism.

Of course they were firm believers in ghosts, from the highest to the lowest; and one person who had died, and was said, to use one of their vernacularisms, ‘to come again,’ put the whole town in a ferment for several days. It was at no old empty house where this dead man was said to have appeared, but one of a row of little cottages that stood together at the very far end of the town beyond the bridge—they were the very last buildings in the town in that direction. There was nothing but fields and lanes beyond them for a considerable distance—excepting an odd house a long way off—until you came to the first village. It was at the very entrance of a lane that came into the main road which led from the ‘town-end’ to the distant village, where this row of

little cottages stood. They were all inhabited at the time the occurrence is said to have taken place which I here record. Before the cottages ran the lane, behind them lay a little field—across the field were other cottages, but on neither side did they open into the field. Excepting these cottages the lane was long, lonely, and houseless, and extended to a wild expanse of solitary marshes, that opened out for miles, without hedge, tree, road, or human habitation. From this long lane other lanes branched off on either hand, those to the right reaching up to the edge of the river, those to the left back into the road before described, and coming out where it ran along the foot of the hills, which were crowned with the long dark fir-plantation. A deep water-course, which emptied itself into the river at the end of the field by which the row of cottages stood, ran along the whole length of the lane and into the lonely marshes. Some of the fields on either hand were divided by the highest, oldest, and thickest hedges, I have ever seen anywhere in England. Between one of these high, dark, aged hedges and the deep water-course, and only a few yards below the row of cottages, there was a wild untrodden patch

of land, cut off from everything by the water, the hedge, and a ruinous wooden bridge, which it was impossible to cross, as the flooring had gone, and the piles were green, slimy, and rotten. On this isolated patch of land there grew several gigantic trees, the stems of which to a great height upward were buried in the tall dense underwood. The roaring of the stream and of the trees on a dark tempestuous night was terrible to hear. No money would have induced you to have lived alone near that wild spot, where nothing was heard of a windy night but the lapping of the water-course, the rustle of the reeds, through which invisible forms seemed ever rushing, and the groaning and moaning of the trees. It was there, where he, who came again, was said to have been first seen—first spoken to—as he stood looking on a stormy night at the gushing water, under the shadow of the groaning trees, while the loose timbers of the ruinous bridge were creaking and swinging and making terrible moan. When he moved he did not walk, but glided to and fro from his cottage-door to the end of the trees, and not beyond them. Then they say he entered his house through the door, although it opened not, and some-

times stirred the fire furiously, and when it was very low, kept up an incessant knocking, until some one arose and put on more coals. They heard him but saw him not ; he was only visible, it was said, to one person, though scores swore they had heard him. He never appeared again to the 'catchman' who first spoke to him, as he was taking his horses, which had been employed in hauling the boat, to turn them into the field at midnight, and who did not know that he had died when he first accosted him, though while living he had seldom passed the door without pulling up his horses to speak to him. He who 'came again' had on the same red waist-coat that night which he had worn when living. People of every religious denomination, and those who boasted that they had no religion at all, sat up for nights in the house—some said he came, others that he did not, some heard something, others nothing ; one party spent the night in singing and praying, another in drinking and smoking. Those who believed called the unbelievers hardened sinners, the latter called the others superstitious fools. But which were right and which were wrong was not known until long after, when the parties next

door on both sides acknowledged to the knocking part of the business, and a wicked rogue who lived in the opposite cottages pleaded guilty to rubbing the wall that fronted the field with a brick, and an old fisherman who wore a red waistcoat, acknowledged that he was trying to 'hanger' for eels, when he was spoken to by the man on horseback, and that although he answered him, he probably did not hear him reply through the blowing of the wind and the roaring of the trees. And many at last believed that there never was any ghost at all, but others thought differently, and probably do so still to this very day. But after the knocking was owned to, if he ever did come he was not seen again. The old town was fairly mad, while the excitement lasted; the believers and the misbelievers ranged themselves on opposite sides, commenced a paper war, and by way of proving the point in dispute, abused each other heartily, and left not a fault untold, as if by that means they hoped to settle the matter, and so bring the argument to a close. Calvinist and Baptist, Churchman and Methodist, Ranter and Unitarian, had all in turn something to say, and had sent out parties to keep watch and ward all night on the spot; and

who kept awake, and who went to sleep, and who run off without so much as saying ‘by your leave,’ and who did care, and who didn’t, who shook, and who stood firm, are all chronicled in the slips of print that were circulated about this Old-fashioned Town, during the raging of the ghost mania, when five out of every ten of the inhabitants seemed to have taken leave of their senses.

It would be difficult to put down the names of half-a-score families in this Old-fashioned Town who were wholly independent, and lived entirely retired from business, calling, or profession. There were several old genteel families in the neighbourhood, but within the town itself very few but what derived their income either from shipping, warehouses, oil-mills, wharves, or something or another in which they had some share, though requiring but very little of their time or attention ; not but what there were several who had ample means to retire upon had they chosen to do so, but they did not.

The only approach to anything like seclusion was the news-room ; there a person must be introduced, and he had little chance of becoming a member unless he were a Tory ‘hip and thigh.’ The cause of

there not being what may be called an aristocracy in Our Old Town was a division amongst the wealthiest inhabitants in religion. Thus the proprietor of the great iron-foundry was a Methodist; of the largest oil-mill, a Calvinist; the greatest builder in the place, a Baptist; and, excepting the Church, the greatest assembly of talent in the town attended the Unitarian chapel. Some of the Quakers, too, were rather wealthy, and they had their own meeting-house. What the retired solicitor was worth, who kept his own carriage, coachman, gardener, footman, and two or three of the smartest female servants in the town, no one knew. His was the nearest approach to what may be called an establishment in the place. His large house was the most conspicuous object in the market-place; it dwarfed even the Moot Hall—that was the front. You then turned round the corner, and full half way up another street, which formed one of the arms of the cross, as I have before described, that branched from the market-place; here you came to his carriage-entrance, which, with a large high-walled yard, that went far out behind into the fields, occupied the whole of the ground that lay at the back half way

up the street. Inside, and upon those high walls grew the choicest fruit that was to be found for miles round that Old-fashioned Town. If there ever was a man as broad and thick as he was high, it was that wealthy lawyer. In stature he was small, but in bulk a Titan. A sugar-hogshead with a hat upon it in proportion to its bulk, and a piece sawn out in the form of the letter A at the bottom, so as to leave a little opening to give you an idea of the space between two legs, would form no bad representation of that 'tun of man.' The sides of his carriage were all door, and he had to be lifted in. His short thick legs—nearly the bulk of an ordinary man's body—were encased in top-boots and leather breeches, while over his coat-collar spread an enormous club-tail. His head was that of a giant, his face red as a flaming sunset, his nose a burning fire. If he were shut up in the carriage only for a few minutes, the steam ran down the glass in torrents; his body was hot as a boiling boiler, which in form it resembled. Had you sat on a chair which he had previously occupied, you would have jumped up and expected to have found a fire under you. He was the hottest, roundest, reddest man the eye ever rested upon.

He looked as if he had been thrown suddenly off the sun, and had not yet cooled nor condensed. That great head knew more about the land, and the former owners, and how it changed hands, and why, and when, and for what, that lay around that Old Town for miles—east, west, north, and south, —than all the whole town put together. Peace to his memory ! He was very good to the poor, and what sins he had his charity amply covered. They said he made his money out of the rich families in the neighbourhood, and perhaps he could render as good an account as many of his wealthy clients. For the origin of riches, unless won by patient industry and great mercantile skill, will seldom stand minute investigation if carried very far back ; and those who boast of their descent from the Normans only sprang from robbers and murderers, who, under the name of conquest, killed and took possession, even as the Saxons did before them. Antiquity tarred all with the same dirty brush. Titles won by meritorious deeds are those only that stand unsullied in the pages of history. Wellington worked hard and won honourably his immortal laurels. Many a poor earnest local preacher is not less deserving of a similar

wreath. Excepting the old miller, I do not find an ancient family to place in my pages in the whole of Our Old Town under the head of a wealthy one.

Next in renown to the wealthy lawyer came the head physician, or doctor, as he was always called. He was almost a skeleton, long and wiry as a weasel. In contrast to the lawyer's broad club-tail, he wore a long thin pig-tail, that came half down his back. It was never at rest—the club never moved ; it played from one shoulder to the other while he was talking, like a kitten chasing a cotton-ball—the club-tail lay ‘nerveless, listless, dead.’ His face beamed with intelligence, his eye was keen as the hawk's, and with his sharp aquiline nose, he had a good deal the look of one, if you could shut out the clear ample forehead. In the lawyer's face there was no expression, no emotion ; it was either that of sleep or fixed impenetrable thought ; the mouth firm. The doctor was here, there, and everywhere ; he took the lead in everything gentlemanly : at vestry, church, and on all charitable committees, there he was, with his advice on his lips and his purse in his hand. Nearly the whole town bowed or curtsied to

him when he passed. He was the perfect embodiment of sincerity, and a Tory to the back-bone. Nature had written on his face 'gentleman,' and rich and poor admitted the genuineness of the signature.

Nor must I forget one dear lady, whose image is as vividly before me, with her bright silver spectacles and snowy cap, crimped even under the chin, looking always as clean and fresh as if she had stepped into the world for the first time, and come from somewhere where there was neither dust, dirt, nor speck to stain, and with a colour like a healthy girl of nineteen. I often wished that the doctor had married her, for they were great friends. She was as much the idol of the girls and women as the doctor was of the boys and men, in this Old-fashioned Town. They were ever both 'on charitable thoughts intent;' always doing good, constantly alleviating want and suffering. What a picture it was to see her lady-like figure step into the charity school, and take the sewing from some little orphan, pick it out, hem it down, and set it all right, calling her 'my dear child' all the while, and when she had done often kissing her! I know not how many poor charity children dined with her

on a Sunday. As they grew up she got them places, and her house was the orphans' home on their holidays. When in service she called to see them, cut out their clothes, and helped the poor girls to make them up. I shall never again see such a 'hussiff,' or housewife, as that dear old lady carried. When undone it reached to the floor, like a tailor's pattern-book. It was full of pockets, stuck all over with pins and needles, bodkins and scissors, skeins of thread and silk, and I know not what beside. I once heard her say, 'If I had an idle bone anywhere in my body, and it could be got at, I would have it taken out, suffer whatever I might.' Her beautiful house stood on one of the highest hills that overlooked the town, and commanded views of the country that lay for miles around. I never looked up at it without thinking that from that breezy height she was ever watching over the welfare of its poor inhabitants, and that they had but to beckon, when she alighted down and cheered them by her presence. Were it not robbing heaven of its highest angels one could have wished that such a woman might never die, nor ever grow older. If, as the old poets feigned, flowers spring from the

tears that fall upon the graves of the dead, pyramids of blossoms would have risen above her, that would have overtopped the tower of the ancient church. Many a poor creature in trouble has retired to that grave to weep, and to regret that they ever swerved from the path she pointed out to them to follow ; for all her actions

‘Smell sweet and blossom in the dust.’

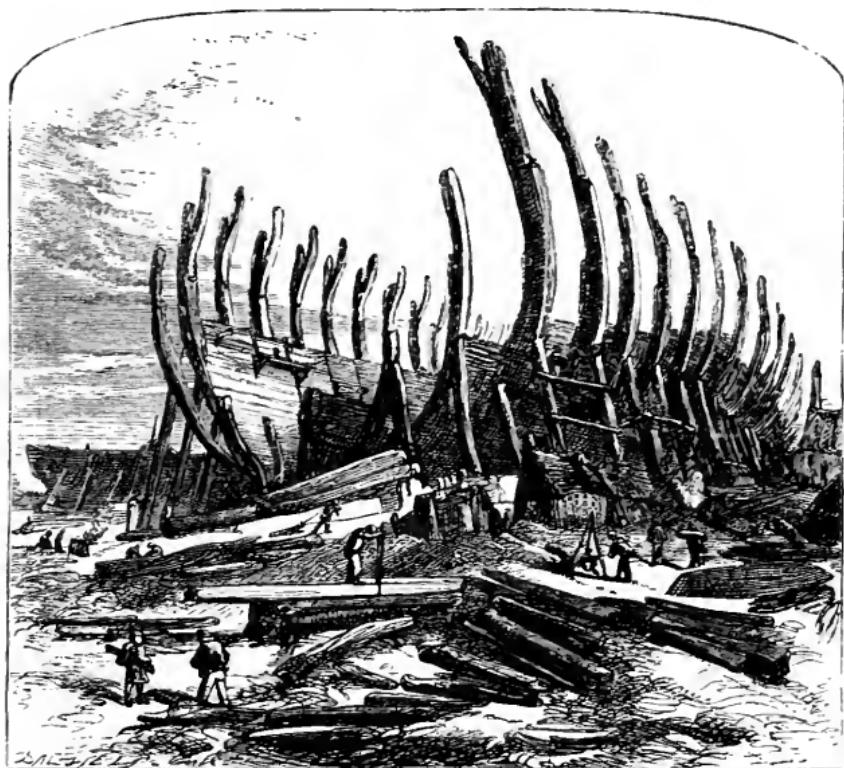
She was what she seemed to be, and many a night has she descended that steep hill, her servant carrying the lantern, through the wind and rain, to comfort and succour the sick and the poor.

Nor must I forget, amongst the worthies of Our Old Town, the dear old currier, who was beloved by all the Sunday-school children, and who amongst them was known by the endearing name of ‘father.’ He never addressed them without shedding tears. While his voice faltered with emotion the tears trickled down his cheeks, down his waistcoat, and often fell on the floor. He always had something good in his pockets for the little ones. One of his addresses I well remember ; it began with a wish and a hope that he might meet all his ‘dear chil-

dren' in heaven. I have read many passages attributed to Wickliffe, but in none have I met with any more striking than those delivered on that occasion by the good old currier. One boy had got into disgrace, I know not for what; it was him he talked 'at,' expressing a fear that if they did this, that, and the other, he might not meet them in heaven. Then he touched on the boy's offence; he pictured meeting some good boy in a future state of happiness, and inquiring after the bad boy. In the imaginary group were other teachers who had gone to heaven, and then an angel was supposed to speak, whom the evil boy had at times listened to, and who had often led him by the hand, and showed him the gates of heaven opened, and also pointed out the abode of eternal misery. And all the while he spoke his eyes were closed, while the tears fell like rain. The good old currier greatly resembled the portrait of John Bunyan, and his style often pleasantly reminded me of the 'Pilgrim's Progress.' He personified almost everything. Life and Death, Good and Evil, were, in his descriptions, persons who walked and talked in the homely vernacular of Our Old Town.

But I should require a folio volume were I to chronicle all the worthies whose good deeds deserve the highest meed of praise that I met with or heard mention of in Our Old Town.





CHAPTER XII.

OLD SHIP-YARD—THE PINDER—OLD SCRATCH, AND THE HAUNTED ROPE-WALK.

THE great ship-yard beside the river was a strange-looking place to wander through ; it occupied several acres of ground, and there was a common footway across it, which led to walks along the river-banks that run through and beside villages, and which ex-

tended for miles. Hundreds of huge barkless oak-trees lay about, and had so lain for years, overtopped by nettles and hemlocks, and half buried in wild weeds ; and among these gigantic trunks the children would play at hide-and-seek for hours together. You wondered how they managed to build so beautiful-looking a thing as a ship out of such large unsightly-looking pieces of timber, which to glance at there seemed no possibility of ever making them fit together. Men were busy sawing here, and chopping there ; and for days you could not tell what had been done to the huge skeleton that stood on the stocks. The process was so unlike building a house, where you can see all that is going on, as it rises brick by brick, that you could hardly tell what the men were doing, until they began to plank over the ribs, and then the progress seemed marvellous. Piles of planks rose here and there, which, as you looked up, caused you to wonder by what means they could have been raised to so amazing a height. On one side of the ship-yard extended a lengthy rope-walk, built of wood, and covered with tiles, and so long, that you wondered wherever the building ended : over field after field it went ; and while you looked

through the openings, you saw busy men with immense bundles of hemp rolled around their waists, walking backwards ; and heard the whirling of wheels and the humming of voices far away, and near at hand, all along that immense building ; for the ship-yard and rope-walk were the greatest manufactories, and employed the largest number of hands in this Old-fashioned Town. I often wondered what they did, so exposed as they were, in a hard, biting, bitter winter. There was no date known as to the time when that 'yarth' was first a ship-yard : for centuries vessels had been built and launched on that spot ; and there were the remains of buildings about the place that looked as if they had been erected hundreds of years. Some of the old saw-pits were overgrown with brambles, and all around there lay the wrecks of things which age only had ruined and rendered useless. The ground was in many places several feet thick, through the accumulation of chips and sawdust, while the air all around was impregnated with the smell of wood and tar. Trunks of trees had been discovered about the yard, black with age, which had been buried by slow degrees, and which centuries back had been brought there for the

purpose of ship-building—but by whom could never be known, though the names of shipwrights as far back as the days of Elizabeth were preserved in the records of Our Old Town.

Old Rowse, the tar-boiler, was a great terror to children, and used to threaten to put them in his tar-tubs if they came near the black smoky hut in which he boiled the tar. Rowse once joined the Ranters, attended their morning prayer-meetings, and, but for an accidental discovery, would no doubt have got credit for having become a reformed character. One Sunday-morning, they missed him at the accustomed place; they thought he must be ill, so went to his house, but no Old Rowse was there, neither did anyone know at what time he had got up and gone out. A little before noon he came limping home, leaning on a stick. He said he had met with an accident—but how he would not say. On the following day the ‘murder was out.’ Old Rowse had been caught in a man-trap while stealing onions. He was found what the old Norman law calls ‘red-handed,’ with his bag beside him half-filled with onions, and his leg fast locked in the trap; fortunately for him it was not one of those formidable traps which are

armed with two sets of teeth. But it held him fast enough for all that ; and when released by the gardener about eleven o'clock, he was compelled to confess that he had been in that unpleasant and painful predicament ever since daylight. He boiled no more tar for the ship-yard after this discovery : though there is but little doubt that it caused him to turn Ranter in earnest ; at least, if he did turn thief again, he was never found out. Before setting a man-trap, it was customary to carry it round the town, accompanied by the town crier, who rang his bell, and gave notice in what ground or garden it was about to be set. It was considered a great feat, by some of the most daring young rascals that were to be found in this Old-fashioned Town, to rob a garden or orchard in which a man-trap had been newly set ; and this I was told they easily accomplished, by striking the ground before them with a heavy pole, when, if they chanced to come upon the trap, it caught the pole, and left them free to plunder and spoil whatever came in their way. I regret to say that garden-robbing was only considered a very venial offence in Our Old Town : nor were those wholly blameless who left the temptation so open,

and the access so easy ; for some of the gardens had no other protection than a low stile, and, for greater convenience, a step or two, like those met with along the footpaths that marked the division of the fields. They had great faith in scarecrows frightening away the birds from the cultivated lands around this old-fashioned place ; and much merriment was caused at times by removing these dumb sentinels, and changing their coats and hats ; or placing them in hidden turnings of the roads, as if they were lying in wait for travellers. And many stories were told of those who had gone a mile or two out of their way to escape a scarecrow, which they mistook for a robber.

A Pinder has always seemed to me a poetical character, ever since I read of the stout Pinder of Wakefield and Robin Hood. His name and occupation are also unchanged—he was called a Pinder in the time of Alfred ; and the Saxon name for the place in which he impounded the stray cattle, was pinfold, the same as it is now ; and he went hunting about the old Saxon tythings and hundreds, in search of stray cattle, in those ancient times, just as he does about the lanes, and roads, and ridings of Our Old

Town in the present day. He also carried a long staff, such as I imagine the quarter-staves to have been that are so frequently mentioned in 'Robin Hood's Garland,' and which, by holding in the middle, they were able to guard the whole body by their dexterous movements, and at the same time take advantage of any opening, and put in such a blow as made the eyes of the opponent flash fire again. In this Old Town he wore the murrey, or chocolate-coloured livery, turned up with green, which I have before described. Some of the townspeople said he was a 'sad old rogue,' and accused him of throwing open the gates in the night, so that the cattle might get out upon the roads, and then be driven by him into the pinfold. But the Pinder used only to laugh, and say, 'If you were to be up as early as I am you would see what I did.' His harvest, he said, was at fair and feast times, when people got tipsy and forgot to fasten their gates. He did not at all like to hear of butcher Far's bull, which some mischievous wags had turned loose, and then sent him in search of, telling him that Nanny Harrison's cow was in the second Car lane.

Much mirth it made if they could coax the Pinder

into a good humour to tell how he run, while the bull followed bellowing at his heels ; and how he had to dodge the infuriated animal round this tree, and that post ; how when he took to the pond the bull came rushing in after him, and when he got out again, gave him chase ; and so followed him until he reached the pinfold, the gate of which was fortunately open, and which he had only just time enough to close, when the bull came full butt at it, with a rush and a roar that caused the massy oaken gate-posts to jar again. And how the angry beast kept him there prisoner for hours, butting at the pinfold with all his might whenever the Pinder attempted to move. Then the laugh grew louder as another took up the story, and told how when the owner and his men came, they refused to drive the bull away until the Pinder paid the same sum to be released as the butcher would have had to pay, if the Pinder had succeeded in pinning the bull, instead of the bull pinning the Pinder. Many a merry hour had been passed, and many a loud laugh raised at this Pinder-and-Bull story.

The Pinder lived with, and was, I believe, some relation to an old chair-maker and turner, who went

by the name of Scratch-and-go-one, through the primitive poll-lathe in which he turned the materials for his chairs. Instead of the wheel-and-strop, and quick regular rotary motion of the general turning-lathes, a long pole came over the old man's head, from which was suspended a string of catgut; a turn or two of which went round the article which was to be operated upon in the lathe. Thus the string ran from the elastic pole overhead, round the article to be turned, and down to the 'treddle' worked by the foot, which was the only motive-power given to the lathe. Consequently, when the 'treddle' was pressed down, the article revolved towards the turner, and could be operated upon by either chisel or gouge; but when the 'treddle' rose up, the wood in the lathe turned backwards, and then there was no possibility of making a stroke, as, instead of approaching the edge of the tool, it turned from it; hence it made as many revolutions backward as forward. After taking one stroke, he had to wait until it came round again—and through this he got the name of Old Scratch, or Scratch-and-go-one; and it is just probable that the term of Old Scratch had some such origin. I have never before nor since

seen any such simple nor primitive lathe. It had neither crank nor spindle, but was all wood and string, excepting the points that held the article to be turned in the frame-heads. It was a relic of the invention of turning, such as was first used when the art was in its infancy, and has probably never been used for general purposes anywhere during the last century, excepting in this slow-changing, Old-fashioned Town. What the old man's lathe could not accomplish through want of speed, he made up by working extra hours. Four in summer, and five in winter were the hours Old Scratch commenced working, leaving off at eight at night when the days were long, and nine when they were short. He never made a holiday—never lost a day; he said 'he had no time to be ill;' and so he had gone on labouring through a long half-century, and at last managed, by hard work and strict economy, to purchase the house he had so long slaved in, together with four small houses that stood behind, and which altogether let for about sixteen pounds a-year. And this was all he had saved. I often wondered what he might have been worth, if instead of his poll-scratching machine, he had possessed a first-rate

lathe. The patterns of some of his chairs would delight the eye of a lover of ancient furniture, for they were the same as his grandfathers had made before him ; and there were the descendants of old families who came from the neighbouring villages that would purchase no other pattern. Such chairs had been in their families so many years ; and they would have their new ones the same pattern.

While the old turner got up, his neighbour the carrier went down ; no one seemed to know how, unless it was through a quicker conveyance starting, that went the whole journey without stopping, excepting to bait. His grandfather before him had been a carrier, put up at the same roadside houses, and stopped at the same place at the end of his journey, eighty years ago. The business was also prosperous under the father, but under the management of the son it fell to the ground, though he did not give in without having a very hard struggle for it. The extent of his journey was twenty-five weary miles, along a low, heavy, sandy road, if road it might be called, which was never repaired or taken care of at all. Hundreds of tons of stones have been shot upon different parts of it at various times, but

all was of no use, the sand was soon again uppermost, and no vestige left of what had been thrown upon it ; so it was left to chance, and no other road united the two market towns, without going several miles round, and then the tolls came very heavy. And so the poor fellow dragged his way through the 'killing sand,' as he called it, until he dragged his horses off their legs and his cart to pieces ; every journey occupying a longer time than the former one, though each load became lighter, while the new conveyance paid the tolls, went round the longer and better way, and did the journey in a third of the time. Even the slow-moving packets hauled by horses at last beat him. Those whose forefathers had employed his family for nearly a century, sent goods by him as long as ever they could, though they greatly inconvenienced themselves by so doing. But it had ever been a kindly custom, in Our Old Town, to help one another, though they often did so with many a foreboding shake of the head, as was the case with the poor carrier, which said plainer than words could utter it, 'It's all of no use, but we'll do our duty.' His horses became thinner, poorer, 'higher of bone and lower of flesh,' every week ; his rickety

cart took more time repairing after every journey, and he returned later and later every week. Even very old women who had journeyed by him for years, when they went to visit their relatives in one or another of the villages which he passed through, complained that 'in spite of their years and their rheumatics, they could walk the distance in half the time, and that the poor horses had enough to do to carry themselves, without dragging any other load. They were very sorry for him, and should still send anything by him that was not wanted in a great hurry.' Then he began to have 'breaks down,' was heard of with a wheel off here, and a poor horse laid up there, until there was never any certainty to a day or two as to when he would return, and at last of all, meat, and fish, and other perishable things which he was intrusted with, were spoiled through these delays on the road, and people were afraid to send anything by him at all. Meantime the opposition kept making improvements, and from twice a-week at length went the journey every other day, which in their palmiest days his father and grandfather had never managed in less than from two days going, and the same time in returning; so he was fairly compelled to give up,

to sell his cart and horses for what they would fetch, and finally go into the 'good-stuff way,' stand market, and hawk his wares from house to house, like the contented owner of the 'Willing Mind.' So ended the carrying business of one of the old families of Our Old Town.

Nanny Wells, who kept cows, after many years 'pinching and saving,' and just as she was about giving up business, and had bid money for a little house and garden at the foot of the Milking-hills, was taken suddenly ill and died. She was a near relation of the poor carrier's and it was expected would have left him a legacy, but she did not. If there ever was a living illustration of one who parted with money as if they were parting with their teeth, it was to be found in Nanny, and in the wry faces she made whenever she had to put her hand into her pocket. She would go into the grocer's shop and begin with, 'What is your moist sugar a pound?' 'Six-pence, Nanny.' 'What! Is it no cheaper yet?' 'No cheaper.' 'When will it be cheaper?' 'I don't know.' 'Well then I shall only take two ounces. I did intend having a whole quarter of a pound if it had come down in price. Surely tea's not what it

was?' 'Just the same.' 'Then I must give up drinking it and take to my agrimony again, unless you can find a little dust at the bottom of your canister that you can let me have a penny or two an ounce cheaper—you can't? well then I must take a quarter of an ounce, but this is the last time, remember, while it's so dear, and let me have it mixed, a little of the most green. I would'nt have it at all at the price, only that Sally Sharpe's invited herself to have a dish of tea with me, and she might not like agrimony tea. And now let me have a penn'orth of butter. Deary me! deary me! how the money goes, nearly a groat for this mite of tea, sugar, and butter. I've given up eating butter myself, but Sally Sharpe wouldn't like dry bread, I dare say, and I have no dripping in the house. I wish now I'd had lard, I should have saved a farthing, besides having my weight for my money, and it would have been quite as nice to a bit of toast. I must trouble you to change it if you please. I'm sure you must have made a mistake and given me half a quarter of an ounce of tea instead of a whole quarter. Well I can never keep hold-open-doors if things keep up at such a frightful price.' And so Nanny went on

grumbling, and hoarding together old spade-ace guineas in bran which she kept in a worsted stocking, until it became so heavy that she had to strengthen it by sewing one remnant upon another, so that the layers of rag were at last almost as numerous as the layers of gold. She seemed to think that the safety of her guineas depended on the thickness of the covering in which they were hoarded. All her 'hard savings' went to a poor sister to whom, at their last interview, she had refused the loan of a shilling, under the plea that she had nothing to spare. It was supposed, that the feeling of having to part, all at once, with so large an amount as she had offered for the house and garden (and which offer had been accepted), preyed upon her mind, and that as she could not run off her bargain, she took to bed and died, as she could see no other way of obtaining a release.

Nanny used to keep her cows in summer in a field over the bridge: how she lived, after having to pay the toll every time she went over to milk, so many years as she did, and so fond as she was of money, was a marvel to many. The field lay at the end of an old deserted ropery, or rope-walk, which had never been used for no one could remember how many

years. There was a rumour of a long lawsuit, and that when it terminated everything was in such a dilapidated and ruinous state as to not be worth taking possession of. For a long way down it was fenced in by huge aged thorns on both sides: long years ago they had probably formed hedges, through which gaps had been broken from time to time, until many of the stems grew into each other, and so formed what to appearance seemed one tree, though really consisting of several united stems. And so they had grown together, and shot up year after year until they had overshadowed the deserted ropery and the ruinous sheds, and made altogether as dark and melancholy-looking a place as the imagination can well picture. Wooden wheels lay rotten and buried in rank weeds; posts and beams of wood, on which the ropes had been suspended, lay just where they had fallen through sheer decay, for no one had disturbed them, as the place bore an evil name, one of the proprietors having hanged himself in one of the sheds; so that even the mischievous boys left everything unmolested, undisturbed. The bridge toll had also a good deal to do with keeping them back, as it had to be paid every time they went across: had it been

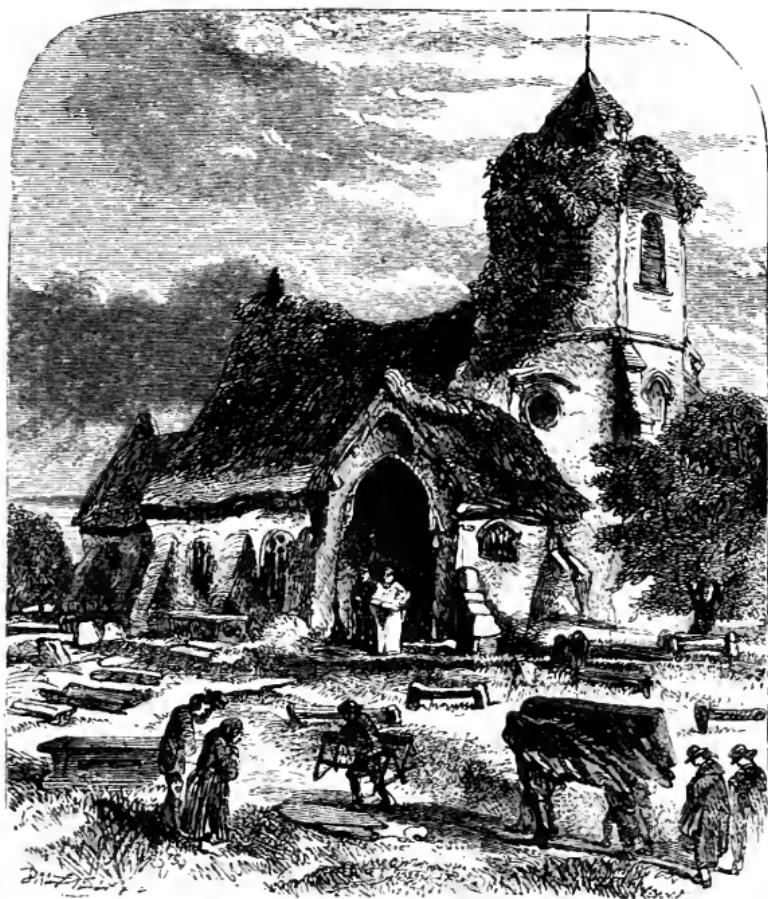
on the town-side of the river, its solitude would have been oftener invaded, and in the dark winter nights, all the moveable timber carried off for firewood. What added to the gloom and desolation of the spot was a long pool of stagnant water, covered in summer by a close-growing small aquatic plant called by the country people ducks' meat. This green-covered, smooth, verdant-looking water, which might have tempted the foot of the unwary to have crossed it, from its lawn-like appearance, had a strange eiry unearthly look in the deepening twilight when seen between the openings of the aged thorns. The water below was also very deep, and into its depths it was said a pretty milkmaid plunged some century ago, because her love was slighted by a young rope-maker, and that her body (as she had foretold) was never recovered. Of course she 'came again,' and her footmarks might be seen every morning on the green-mantled pool. I forget the words of the curse she uttered against the rope-walk, but after she drowned herself no one ever prospered in it ; as she had prophesied it should go gradually to ruin as her body slowly decayed : for such was the old-world story connected with the deserted rope-walk.

There are no doubt similar traditions of ghostly doings connected with most of the very old towns in England, and some of them extending too far back for the origin to be traced. I have, however, generally found that a suicide, committed under similar circumstances to what are familiar to us in the present day, was a rare occurrence a century ago, and awakened deeper feelings of either horror or pity than it does now. A superstitious dread reigned over the spot where it was committed, springing at first from the act, then into the mind while contemplating it, and so on through many minds, the dread deepening as it descended from generation to generation, until by a kind of common consent the scene of the tragedy was looked upon as cursed, and kept neglected till it became ruinous and desolate. Sometimes a spirited proprietor exorcised the place, by destroying as far as possible every trace of the disastrous deed, and in almost every such instance, the spot either recovered its good name, or the deed was soon forgotten. In new towns and villages that have sprung up we hear none of these superstitious stories, though self-destruction is committed in such places. A ghost to be anywise respectable must be old—a new one has no

chance at all, but would, so to speak, be hissed from the stage. There is a something shadowy and mystical about the past, which the wisest of us cannot clearly comprehend, and in certain moods of mind we listen gravely to the tales of

‘ Airy tongues that syllable men’s names,’ under a similar influence to that which causes us to take up a work, and become interested in a story which we know has not a word of truth in it. I never felt this more forcibly than while, on the spot, listening to the haunted legends which were fully believed in by many of the superstitious inhabitants of Our Old Town.





CHAPTER XIII.

OUR ITINERANTS—SOTS' HOLE—THE SWEEP—OUR OLD
CHURCH—THE OLD HALL.

LIKE the moving figures in a panorama, must the remainder of the characters that stood out most conspicuously in this Old-fashioned Town, pass before the eyes of my readers. And first come the

regular itinerants. Lame Bobby, who walked with two sticks, and had his basket hung before him, has long since ceased to cry—

‘Old Moore’s almanack, new, new, new,
Most of it lies, and some of it true ;’

‘and very little true,’ he would add, as he made a side shuffle, which brought him half-forward; for as he used to say, ‘I move at twice,’ which he did by placing his stick down and bringing up one foot as near as he could, and then, changing hands, he brought up the other, and by that means kept moving, either talking to himself all the time, or to any one he met, for his tongue never ceased. Following him, perhaps, would come Blind Tommy, whom they used to say, lost his sight whilst marching over the sands of Egypt. He always wore a soldier’s coat, and sold many a pennyworth of ‘real Barcelona’s,’ through telling his customers what he had seen, and where he had marched and fought. Then came Old Cureall, as he was always called, chanting his carol, and wheeling his cart: he was the first who dwelt in that mysterious compound of treacle, or sugar, of which hundreds of tons have since

been sold under the name of 'rock.' He used to sing some doggrel lines about its curing every disease, and that those who bought enough of it, would never need a doctor. He was a fine portly fellow, with a powerful voice, which could be heard an immense distance across the river on a still night, as far as the village it was said, that lay a full mile away. 'Fine white sand cockles' was another familiar cry in the streets of Our Old Town, and never was there a more thirsty soul than he who cried them—which he said was no wonder, as before he was born, his mother ate nothing but salt and red-herrings, so that he came into the world with a spark in his throat, which he had never been able to quench. Codfish and cockle-sauce was a common dish in this Old-fashioned Town, and oyster-sauce a thing almost unknown. Next come 'Pies all hot,' and a merry story he used to tell of 'how his missus began the pie business,' and sold the first six dozen she made in about an hour, boasting to him that she had cleared eighteenpence by them, but clean forgetting to reckon the loin of mutton she had cut up, and used in making them, and which had cost three shillings, not reckoning it in the cost at all,

‘because she had it in the house.’ He used to say, ‘Ah! they might well sell, when each pie stood her in nearly three half-pence. She never made any more such pies.’ He was an old man-of-war’s-man, and was on board the *Bellerophon*, so he said, when Nelson was wounded. He had been in one or two naval engagements, and used to often wish that he had been wounded, so that he might have had a pension. Then there were the water-sellers, with their great water-butt, which they drew into such neighbourhoods as were the furthest from the river, and not supplied by the Old Waterworks. They were brothers, and both of them old Greenland fishermen, and their conversation was interlined with phrases that smacked of the whale fishery. If a woman came out and made a sign that she wanted supplying with water, he who first saw her, would say to the other, ‘Do you see where she rises, be quick and harpoon her.’ They called having ale and bread and cheese ‘getting their blubber on board;’ though in this Old-fashioned Town going to the alehouse was generally termed ‘going to have their lounce;’ thus it was a common reply if any woman inquired after her husband who was at the public

house, for him who first returned to say, ‘I left him having his lounce.’

The Old Town had of course its topers, who generally met at a tavern most appropriately called ‘The Sots’ Hole.’ Dantzic spruce and rum, which they called black-beer and rum, was what they generally got fuddled upon, and which they drank hot with sugar. How they could sit in that long, low, half-lighted room the hours they did, drinking and smoking, without being suffocated, often puzzled me, as I looked in when passing the window. Puff-and-dart, and fox-and-geese, were the chief amusements in these places. Jacky, as he was called, the little tailor, was the ‘king of good fellows’ among these topers. He had once played the part of Juba, in ‘Cato,’ when it was brought out by the amateur theatricals, and amongst those by whom he was principally applauded, were the family of the great corn merchant, who lived ‘down town.’ They were so delighted with his performance, that ever after, when they met, the wealthy merchant honoured Jacky with a polite bow. This was the last remnant of respectability, and he clung to it like a burr as long as ever he could muster the

means of making himself decent. The merchant and his household, as I have before described, went regularly to church every Sunday, and they always passed Jacky at one particular spot, where he stood ready to receive and return the honoured bow. No matter how he might have passed the week ; or, if even he went to his favourite 'Sots' Hole' the very minute they had gone by. There he was, with one hand behind, and the other holding his hat, which he took off in the most approved style ; returning at least a dozen bows for the one he received. But vanity at last sundered this last link of respectability, he was not content to receive this homage without others witnessing it. He spoke of his friend the corn merchant, as if they had been hand-and-glove, instead of never having exchanged a single word. His pot companions must come and see the terms they were on, the honour that was paid him. They did come—they drew up behind Jacky—such a seedy assembly, and half-t tipsy into the bargain, that when the merchant and his family came up within a few yards of where they stood, and just as Jacky had run his hand through his hair for the last time, and was preparing to

‘coin his cheek to smiles,’ they turned off into the middle of the street, the corn merchant leading the way, not even deigning to turn their heads, though the servants that brought up the rear were observed to titter. And so they cut him dead, while as if to add insult to injury, his half-drunken companions set up such a laugh, as was heard half-way up the street, and which increased as it went along. Jacky never received another bow, never boasted of his friend the wealthy merchant after, nor did the respectable again.

Two more figures pass: one wearing the costume that was commonly in fashion nearly a century ago—she was upwards of ninety when I first saw her in the streets of Our Old Town, yet active as many a woman of forty. Her bow-legged boy Billy, was trudging before her with his soot-bag over his shoulder. Her family had been sweeps in the town, and, as she said, ‘paid rent for the same house, for nearly three hundred years.’ She was the last of a long race; she wore the old-fashioned coal-scuttle-shaped bonnet, as it is called in the country, a dark claret-coloured quilted petticoat stitched into diamond squares, and which was shown

through the skirt of her high-waisted gown, being drawn up, and tucked through the pocket-hole; high-heeled shoes, and stockings with 'clocks' worked up the sides. She supported herself on a walking-cane with a crutch-shaped horn-handle, which was black, and polished like marble through use and age, and over her neck and shoulders wore a kind of cape, which in this Old-fashioned Town was called by its old original Saxon name of 'tippet.' In spite of her great age, whenever a chimney was swept, she accompanied her boy Billy, helped to fix up the soot-cloth over the grate, and seating herself by the hearth, listened to hear as she said, 'that he didn't go to sleep,' and hallooed to him to 'scrape it well out,' then swept up the hearth and the hobs herself, for she could not trust Billy, who was one of the fattest and laziest little sweeps the eye ever rested upon. She had her sitting at church, and on Sunday went accompanied by her boy Billy, who was, 'as clean as a new pin,' and wore a frill or 'ruffle,' as she called it, round his neck, which the old woman herself crimped or plaited with a little silver-bladed knife. But Billy betrayed his business about his ears, which

inside were of the 'soot, sooty.' Rumour said that the old woman had a very handsome amount in the bank, and it was amusing at her great age, when the subject was alluded to, to hear her 'Thank heaven that she had provided against a rainy day.' Billy was her last apprentice. She said, 'if he were a good lad, when he was out of his time, she should give up her business to him;' which no doubt she did, and that Billy lived to drive some little sweep before him, as he himself had been driven. She never allowed him to call 'sweep,' in the streets;— taking out her old-fashioned silver snuff-box, she would say, 'Heaven be thanked I never had to do anything so low as that,' then, jerking her head with the air of a duchess, adding, 'I have my connection.' She was very particular with the town coal-porters, giving them, as she said, 'all a turn, in their turn.' They stood in a row by the water staith, and had from a penny to twopence a sack allowed them for portage. No cart was permitted to take coals to any part of the town without their receiving the portage just the same as if they carried them all the way on their backs. They were a very ancient company, and called each

other by nicknames, which had no doubt been used by their predecessors through far-back generations. One was called Silverlips, and the other Peewet, and as they died off, and others filled up their places, he who succeeded to the vacant coal-sack inherited the old nickname.

The coals burnt in this Old-fashioned Town were called sea-coal, and were as small as if they had passed through a fine riddle, yet making excellent fires. They called an iron utensil, which they kept inside the fender to place anything that they wished to keep hot upon, 'the horse;' another they fixed before or on the fire, 'the trivett;' the hook that hung in the chimney, and on which their pots were suspended while cooking, 'rembling hooks,' to 'remble' signifying with them to remove, and as these hooks could either be raised or lowered, the above epithet was prefixed to the name. The stick, or wooden pin they used for stirring their soup or porridge, was called the 'thible.' Gate was used in the sense of way, thus, instead of saying 'get out of the way,' they would use the word 'gate.' They called being low-spirited, feeling 'doley,' a burial a 'berrin,' an abbreviation for

burying. Many of them made beforehand, and showed to their friends, the clothes they wished to be buried in. They were always kept in a separate drawer, along with such little keepsakes as they wished to be placed in their coffins. They believed it prevented a person from dying easily if the door were locked, or the pillow on which the head rested contained pigeon feathers. At a funeral the 'berrin-cake' was always handed round; sometimes it was made beforehand by the deceased. The 'passing bell' was tolled for the death of the poorest pauper, and the 'span-long babe' in this Old-fashioned Town. Nowhere have I seen so much reverence paid to death.

And the old church! The first thing that struck you on entering it was the large Royal Arms above your head, over which was written, in letters of gold, 'Honour the King.' You looked higher, and saw the flags of the Volunteers drooping above your head and covered with dust. They had hung there ever since 'Prince Charlie came over the water,'—tattered relics of the would-have-been-defenders of Our Old Town, if the Pretender had approached that old-fashioned place, which he did not, although he came

within very few miles of it. There were long sloping galleries on each side, abutting on massy pillars crowned with Corinthian capitals, and which had a grand gloomy look. Green curtains could be drawn to keep out the sun. The pulpit, which stood very near the centre of the church, had cushions covered with crimson velvet, edged with gold. These trappings were the gift of an old general who was buried in the churchyard, the spoil won in some battle at which he had fought. The old clerk's large folio prayer-book was thumbed to bits ; half of many of the pages were worn away ; but he knew the whole service by rote, and had no use for the book. He had a fine voice, and there was a peculiar thrill in his 'A-a-men' that made the old church ring again ; it reminded you of the fall of Corporal Trim's hat—it went to the heart. His gown had once been black velvet, but time had given it a brown russety tinge, which in the seams looked like an ancient white trying to become black again, so that like Joseph's coat it was 'of many colours.' When he blew his nose it was like the bursting of an organ-pipe. And the vicar's, the jolly vicar's, his port-wine-tinged face showed above his white surplice like a round

red sunset on the summit of a mountain of snow. It would never have done for him to have preached on abstinence, his huge double-chin would have risen up in judgment against his preaching and practice. His curate was as pale and thin as he was red and stout ; his very looks rebuked the great red greasy vicar, and he never seemed to sit easy in the curate's presence. The vicar was as fond of plays as he was of port, and the curate lost no opportunity of preaching 'at' him, by denouncing theatres, drinking, and cards from the pulpit. Still for all that, and with all his venial faults, there was no man more beloved in Our Old Town than the vicar. He believed that the good things of this earth were sent for man's enjoyment, and he enjoyed them. He did not think that a seat in heaven was to be won by making ourselves here a hell upon earth ; that it was a sin to go to a theatre, drink a bottle of port, or take a hand at cards with his dear old friends. These were no doubt his greatest sins—at least such the tight-laced puritanic world would call them ; but they were such that his good deeds, written on the opposite page, would more than counterbalance a thousand times, they were so trivial, so social, and so little tinged

with self, compared to a love of good fellowship, a wish to make all about him happy, that Sterne's recording angel, while he read, would drop his tear upon them, as he did on the light calendar of Uncle Toby's sins, 'and blot them out for ever.'

Oh ! what tables of bequests written in letters of gold were catalogued on the crescent-shaped walls of the east end of the church, behind the communion-table, and which were left to the poor 'for ever.' Surely no one could ever kneel there and take the sacrament, with those gold letters glittering upon him, like the mild eyes which had looked on and registered the gifts there recorded to 'the poor, the fatherless, and the widow,' then rise and misapply a single farthing of the property bequeathed in solemn trust by the dead of departed centuries who lay around and beneath. That stout lawyer knew best : they say that when he died, there died with him many secrets which affected the rights of the poor and the claims of the rich,—that had he chosen he could have dissparkled and disforested many a down and dale, and turned out many an owner who seemed to sit securely in the midst of his wealth by a simple scratch of his pen. Secrets which will never now

be revealed, until that last dreadful day when the trumpet of the Eternal One awakes the dead, and there is no distinction shown, excepting that made by their own deeds while on earth, to the unnumbered millions its world-shaking peal will summons from their graves.

Then there were monuments let into and projecting into the walls, none of them very ancient, though some had reference to the dead who had departed this life long, long ago ; for the body of the church had been rebuilt, and the tower alone was ancient, being a fine specimen of the very early Norman. That had been a landmark which had stood and overlooked marsh and moor and wold longer than had been recorded in any document that had been preserved in this Old-fashioned Town. Cracked and crumbling and weather-beaten as it is, its old square walls will yet hold together through many a year that yet sleeps in the womb of time, and which in due season will come forth delivered of events that we shall never know. By whom that tower was first reared, or what ancient Saxon or Danish church first stood upon the site it now occupies, the dead have given us no intimation : even the very name

of the Saint it was first dedicated to has perished. Offa the Terrible once ruled with a rod of iron over the country that stretches for leagues around Our Old Town, long before the Sea Kings had destroyed the neighbouring monastery of Bardney and the Saxon abbies of Crowland and Peterborough. On the site of the old hall, which that ancient church-tower overtops, stood the Mercian castle in which a Danish king died, and tradition says that a Saxon church then stood where the tower is now standing twelve hundred and fifty years ago. But long before that period Alfred the Great, then serving in the army commanded by his brother king Ethelred, had marched through the streets of this Old-fashioned Town accompanied by Burrhed, king of Mercia, to attack the Danes, who were then in possession of Nottingham. Further back I dare not venture, though I might fill many a page with a record of the events that occurred in and around Our Old Town long before the reign of Alfred. The old hall was a huge dilapidated building, forming three sides of a square; one, if not both the wings, had been added within the last two hundred and fifty years; portions of the centre that faced the moat behind were

considerably older. It had been let off for a long time in separate rooms for shops and dwelling-places, to the great disgrace of the owner, for it was one of the finest old baronial mansions that could be found within many miles of this Old-fashioned Town. But excepting the walls and a few architectural ornaments, both within and without, there was but little left to proclaim its former grandeur beyond its massiveness and the immense space of ground it covered. You peeped in and saw its great ground-floor apartments occupied by joiners, and coopers, and bricklayers—depositaries for lime, hair, and bricks—and you turned away disgusted. In one of the few stained-glass windows that remained over the low broad archway, which had commanded a view of the garden behind, and no doubt had, in former times, been beauty's bower, a mass of unsightly rags were stuffed through the centre of the deep-dyed shield, that blushed 'with the blood of kings and queens.' I turned away with a sigh, and had not the heart to venture further in my researches into the old hall, portions of which, I have no doubt, were built long before the time of Henry VIII., though that seems to be the earliest period from which any authentic

history has been preserved of its possessors. Fallen as it is from its high estate, there is something poetical and picturesque in its appearance, more especially when seen from a distance, for near at hand it is 'a sorry sight.' From the most commanding point of view its vast outline strikes the beholder as a fine wreck of the feudal age, and you felt a great wish to know who had tenanted that tower, and what guests had assembled in ancient times in that large banqueting-hall. But beyond a name or two nothing at all is known of the place, excepting what has been handed down by tradition, and is connected with a ghost story of a baron's daughter who was starved to death in the turret, and who, of course, 'came again.' Who ever yet knew an ancient building without its ghost and buried pots of gold? Anybody about the old hall would tell you of the young painter, who was at work inside, and who was picked up senseless, with the paint-brush in his hand, who for days after could only exclaim, 'She is there—there she is!' and who, when he was restored, told a tale of the lady in white, who appeared to him and beckoned him to follow; smiling at first, then looking angry because

he did not obey ; and he knew no more. Instead of twelve o'clock at night, however, the general hour when ghosts 'most do congregate,' this White Lady of the Hall chose to make her appearance at twelve o'clock in the day.

While touching on matters connected with the past, I must here mention, that a few miles seaward from this Old-fashioned Town there is a place in the river called 'The Stumps,' and over which vessels deeply laden can only pass at high-water. The impediment consists of the roots and trunks of enormous trees, black with age, amid which are mingled huge heavy stones, which seem as if they had been sunk to keep the stems of the trees buried. They are only to be found at this particular bend of the river. The trees have been there for ages, and are black as ebony, and when dried almost as hard as iron. How they came there no one can tell. The mouth of this river was a favourite landing-place for the Danes in ancient times. It is frequently mentioned in the Saxon chronicles. Were these stems and stones sunk to prevent the daring sea-kings from reaching this Old Town in their vessels ? There is neither timber nor stone near the spot where they

are sunk on either side of the river ; nor does there appear to have been either near at hand at any period, for all around is flat and marsh ; and on what are still called the 'flats,' porpoises, that come up from the sea, frequently get aground at low water. They were either placed there for some purpose, or are vestiges of some mighty change which that part of the country has undergone at a very remote period, and of which traces can be found nowhere beside in the ancient neighbourhood. They are dreaded by the sailors. Many have been taken up, but the complaint is that others arise in their places, and that 'stumps' will be found there for ever. Portions of an extinct mastodon have been found near the spot, so I must leave geologists to decide whether they are the remains of a primæval forest, mixed up with remnants of early rocks that have been carried thither by icebergs, or were placed there by the early Britons or Saxons as a guard against invaders from the sea, and to protect Our Old Town.





CHAPTER XIV.

RAMBLES AROUND THE SUBURBS OF OUR OLD TOWN.

ALTHOUGH a little repetition is almost unavoidable, as I have here and there stepped aside into the highways or byways that lie around this Old-fashioned Town, yet my sketches—far from being perfect as they are—would be less so did I not

glance at the suburbs, which seem inseparable from the place I have been describing. In one direction I found all the villages either standing on the summits, on the sides, or at the foot of the hills ; and not any by the borders of the river, but often separated from them by rich marshes a mile or two in breadth. This seemed at first at variance with the records of antiquity, as in the early ages the first settlers in a country reared their habitations and pastured their flocks beside the water-courses ; and as all the churches in these low-lying villages were very old, they were a proof that there the residences of the first inhabitants had been erected in very remote times. I, however, soon discovered that during high-tides, or after a long continuance of rain, and always at some time or another during the winter, these immense marshes which furnished such rich pasturage for cattle in summer, were flooded, and very often remained under water for several weeks. This accounted for these old villages standing so far removed from the river, and also showed that for centuries the face of the country had undergone no change. There was no walk so solitary, and yet to me so pleasant, as the long range

of embankment that followed every winding of the river, and ran for miles along the water-edge, although so far away from any habitation. To the right, the broad river went plashing and murmuring at the foot of a foreground of reeds, and almost every variety of water plants, which were overtopped by willows that played and swayed at the touch of the lightest breeze ; and sometimes, when the tide was low and the sun shone, you might quit the embankment and walk low down close beside the edge of the water for miles, and not meet with a living soul. There was no sound but the ripple of the river, the rustle of the reeds and willows, excepting when some fish in pursuit of its prey rose up and made a loud plunge as it again descended into the water ; or when the tufted plover went wailing by, or the lowing of cattle behind the embankment fell pleasantly upon the ear. Yet these sounds seemed not to break the silence, but only as it were to give a low voice to the stillness that reigned around, and which would have been too death-like a solitude but for this just audible breathing of nature. Now and then you saw a solitary fisherman in his little boat, setting or gathering in his ‘bottom lines,’ which he

drew up with a small drag, or 'grapnel' as it was called, for no nets were allowed to be used in the river, for within many long miles of Our Old Town.

Sometimes your walk by the water-edge was suddenly cut off by a deep dyke that emptied itself into the river through broad lofty sluice-gates that opened at the entrance of a brick arch, and through which, when the gates were open, you caught sunny glimpses of the green pastures that lay behind. And at this outlet the plumed heron might often be seen like a lonely sentinel watching for the fish which were ever passing to and fro into and out of the river, for in these dykes the small fry remained until they were strong enough to launch out and stem the swift current that ran wide and far beyond the gates within which they had been imprisoned. Under these arches the swallows built safe beyond the reach of the boldest bird-nesting boys, though at times their young ones fell from the nests into the water, and became a prey to the long-jawed pikes that lay in waiting below.

Having wandered in this direction until you were weary, you then struck down some long green lane-like road—one perhaps lying beside the broad deep

dyke just described, and with trees on either hand, until you came to one of the villages at the foot of the hills. After a walk of two or three miles—here the scenery wore an entirely new aspect—the heavy sand road that cleaved its way between tall hedges, and run through beautiful villages, was hemmed in on both sides with meadows and corn-fields, orchards and gardens, coppice and croft, and little green home fields, where the first lambs ran, and the spotted calves were fattened into ‘unfinished beef’ for the morbid eaters of veal. Pleasantly situated were these low-lying villages, with the broad breezy unenclosed marshes behind, and the gently-sloping eastern hills before, over which the sun came and rose almost at their very doors, seeming so near, that when his golden shoulders first rested on their green summits, you might almost fancy that you could walk up and thrust your arm into the dazzling disk. Then there were such picturesque old wells, covered in with pent-house roofs, before some of the cottages, the wood of which was bleached so white with sun and wind, and made such a strong contrast amid the dark green foliage amid which they stood, as would have delighted the eye of an artist. And there was

such a sweet smell about these pleasant villages, as caused a town-pent man to pause and open his mouth to inhale the fresh air, and sniff up with all his strength the grateful fragrance ; for the winds that blew about those places, seemed as if they had either been out haymaking, or gathering flowers, and brought back with them the sweets amid which they had been revelling ; and so by this road, along foot-paths that went through fields of corn in summer, which rustled at every stride you took—and over old grazing lands, the pasturage of which have never been broken up within the memory of living man, and here and there under the shadows of huge over-hanging and aged trees, you might return to this Old-fashioned Town ; or if you chose to ascend the hills, footpaths ran up from these villages, and you might come back that way by long lanes that ran far behind the summits, along what seemed a level landscape with other hills beyond, and by woods, and through woods, there were pleasant foot-roads to be found, where, so long as you had neither dog nor gun, you might wander as far, and as long as you pleased unquestioned. Sometimes you stumbled upon the foundation of a monastery, with all its

fallen walls mapped out, and with traces of all its enclosures visible; while near at hand, the great lake-like pond remained undisturbed, containing fish of such extraordinary dimensions, as even a Yarrell would scarcely believe, unless he saw them taken out and weighed before his own eyes. And these spots, so rich in old associations, were almost unknown, excepting to the lord of the manor, or the farmer who rented the land, and to whom they were but so many acres that would produce so much, and to him nothing more. One old grange, still inhabited by a wealthy farmer, stood dreaming in silence amid the solitude of these scenes, like the ghost of a house, that had sprung up, and come back again from out the buried ruins that lay around, for there was no other visible from the spot on which it stood, and you looked at it with feelings almost verging upon awe. Somehow it seemed like a dead house, as if it had no right to be there at all, as if the purpose for which it was built was now useless, and that it ought long ago to have crumbled into dust, like the remains of its founders, who lay somewhere at hand, though you could not tell where, so often had the scythe and the sickle cut down the produce which

many a forgotten summer had scattered thickly over their graves; yet there were times when this dead house came back as it were to its former life, and revived its ancient sheep-shearing feasts, and harvest-homes, with such obstreperous mirth and revelry, as recalled again its earliest and happiest days. The frumenty was made according to the old receipt, and the roast sirloin stuffed with the ancient mixture of sweet herbs. There was dancing in the huge barn, and swinging on the great old orchard trees, and singing and music everywhere, while eating and drinking never seemed to cease. Having turned your back on the old grange, you went along behind the hills, until you came to one or another of the roads, either between the plantation, or down by the steep ravine before described, or by the ancient causeway, just whichever your fancy chose to select, and so down by any of these across the backway, and by the old pillared mansion, or down the lane where the beck flowed in former times, and so once more into the streets of this Old-fashioned Town. If instead of turning into the town, the walk on the hills was continued, beautiful views opened every here and there, revealing windings

of the river, and ships coming in from seaward, sometimes with all their sails set and the sunshine falling on them, giving a new change to the scene as they glided on—then were lost behind some clump of trees, from which, after a few moments, they again emerged, and so went on threading their way between every bending of the embankments like things of life. Sometimes when the wind was favourable you heard the ‘*yoe ye yoe*’ of the sailors as they weighed the anchor, or the roaring of the tide as it came rushing up from the sea, like some huge enraged monster. You also caught sight of little villages that lay in the opposite side of the river, across the valley—their white-washed walls, and glittering windows that flashed back the sunlight, standing out in agreeable relief from the surrounding green. And so you went along, looking over an extensive landscape that confused you by its overwhelming beauty. You tried in vain to find out where its green charm lay, but could fix your eye upon no particular spot, no more than in the countenance of an angelic woman, where every particular feature is pleasing and perfect. Then, after pausing to look down the long steep green lane—there are

few such lanes anywhere now, excepting in the neighbourhood of Our Old-fashioned Town—you went through a white swing-gate, and over a large field, through the centre of which the footpath wound, and quitting this reached a little unfenced wood ; your course lying under the trees, for there was no other way. They overhung you every way, forming a long lofty cathedral-like roof above your head, where fir and oak, ash and elm, maple and horse-chestnut, mingled their pleasing foliage in such beautiful variety, and with such graceful form, as made you feel how stiff, and hard, and irony, and cold, the richest architecture that man ever reared is when compared with the light and elasticity of that long aisle, pillared with trees, and roofed with branches. Then you passed on before a large hall, which the people in that Old Town said contained as many windows as there were days in the year. No unsightly fence shut it out, it was only divided from the footpath on which you walked by a dry green moat, the sides and bottom of which were covered with smooth turf. Before the hall lay an immense lawn, green, smooth, and unbroken by either tree or bush. Flower-beds stretched beside and

behind it, while in the distance rose a grove of ancient elms, which had been inhabited by rooks for centuries.

Strange tales were told of the little pale old lady who inhabited that spacious hall. She never went out beyond her own grounds; and there, in the early morning, while the dew lay heavy on the lawn, she might be seen among her flowers, or sweeping the fallen leaves from the broad gravel walks. Sometimes she would call together the wild birds from the adjacent coverts and feed them; and the servants said, that hundreds of birds knew her shrill voice, and refused to come at any other call but that of her own ‘Dick, Dick, Dick; pretty Dick, pretty Dick—Dick—Dick!’ In winter, her pet horses remained in the stables; in summer, they fed in the rich pastures—but they were never used. Her carriage stood rotting in the ancient coach-house; it had never been out for years; only a few old men could remember the time when it was last seen in the streets of Our Old Town. Some said she was a hundred years of age; others that she was more. She saw no company, excepting the fat lawyer and the gentlemanly physician; and it was remarked

that his long graceful pigtail lost all its play after he had visited her, and seemed to lie still and thoughtful on his back for days after. She was the last of an ancient family—of a long race. They said that in her young days she had been disappointed in love, and that ever after she ‘hated the sight of a man.’ That years back she had lost all count of her riches ; and that she would have given orders for a coffin of solid gold to be buried in, but that the lawyer told her it would cause her grave to be broken open, and her body melted down by the robbers, in the same crucible that they would use for melting the gold. They said she had bundles of bank-notes by her, which had been issued by banks that had years ago failed, and which she had never sent in when the establishments were solvent ; and that the lawyer had given orders that she should never be made acquainted with her loss. Her estate extended for miles along the hills that overlooked Our Old Town. The next heir to all this wealth did not even inherit her ancient name, and she could never be prevailed upon to see him ; for she said, ‘It will be time enough for him to enter when I am carried out of the hall doors.’ When she died, permission was

granted by the king for him to assume the ancient name, along with the estates which he inherited. Many an old road did he stop up, and divert many an ancient footpath from its original course, which for centuries had been free to the inhabitants of that Old-fashioned Town. Still, he made many improvements, and preserved from ruin several landmarks that pointed out and belonged to the past.

You passed on through two other fields ; leaving an immense farm on the left, and entering the home-paddock, saw on your right an immense expanse of wood, and before you, in the gentle descent, the thatched roof of an old farm-house. The house itself broke upon you by degrees, as you advanced : first the chimneys, then the thatch, next the chamber-windows, and the tops of the old orchard-trees ; and then the whole building, with its white-washed walls, and low wooden fence. I dwell upon this old farm-house more particularly, as it had been in the same family for nearly three hundred years ; and excepting that it had frequently been re-thatched, had scarcely undergone any other change during the whole of that period. It was my regular resting-place when I wandered in that direction, and there

I always found a cup of home-brewed ale, a wooden trencher, loaded with sweet country fare, and a warm welcome. For three hundred years had that family, through all its generations, regularly attended the market of that Old-fashioned Town. And more than one old family in the town had been supplied with butter, and eggs, and 'sage-cheese,' from that grey and weather-stained homestead for nearly two hundred years. There I discovered among the books, in an arched recess, the first editions of 'Pilgrim's Progress,' 'Walton's Angler,' 'Robinson Crusoe,' and 'Peter Wilkins' Adventures among the Flying Women;' beside old Chap Books numberless, which had been issued from Bowchurch yard, and the 'Looking Glasse,' on Old London Bridge; and which, no doubt, had been purchased at the fairs and markets held in that Old-fashioned Town, and brought, from time to time, by the forefathers of my friend the farmer, to that old homestead in which I found them. What would we not give to know how the first edition of those favourite books became known at Our Old Town, and by what conveyance they reached that out-of-the-way place! Perhaps the ancestor of the aged lady of the hall, who sat in

the parliament of the first Charles, and when Cromwell was Protector, might have heard them talked about in London, and brought back copies to the old Hall, and so their fame might have become spread among his tenants ; or he might have talked about them when he sat at the head of the table on a rent day : for so I used to fancy that it might have been, and that by such means they became known in those grey English homesteads.

This ancient farm-house was bounded on one side by an immense wood, that in one direction extended for two or three miles. In autumn and winter the roaring of that great land of trees sounded like the voice of the ocean. Leaving the old homestead with its little orchard on the right, you passed through a gate overhung by an enormous crab-tree, which in autumn was laden with ruddy-cheeked fruit. Never before have I seen crab-apples so tempting to the eye, yet so sour to the taste : it was amusing to see the contortions of the countenance of those who for the first time bit one. Passing under this tree, a foot-road to the left brought you out, after having crossed two or three gently-sloping fields, into another old highway which went winding into Our Old Town, past the

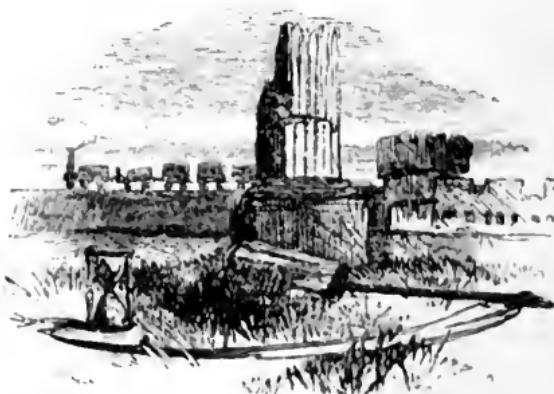
church. This led to and from what was called the 'up-town' villages ; but the hills at the foot of which it ran were higher and more rugged than those which looked over the marshes 'down-town.' There was something almost wild about their aspect when covered with snow, as seen from the banks of the river.

Then there was another road called the Causeway, that went sheer over the hills direct east, past little towns and villages almost direct to the sea which lay many miles away. It shot out, so to speak, from the very centre of this Old-fashioned Town, and went clean away from it like the shaft of a cross, to which the streets on the right and left formed the arms. The ascent was very steep, where it first rose almost abrupt from the backway that touched the town. Four or five miles along this eastern and hilly road lay the wildest scenery in the suburbs of this Old-fashioned Town. Nowhere in broad England could any spot be found more primeval or rugged. If it ever had been cultivated, it was long centuries ago, for it bore no traces of ever having been anything but what it was—a vast, tree-clad, thorn-covered, gorse-choked, fern-smothered wild ; a relic of

the ancient forest land, just as it was when the wolf howled in our island, and the early Britons dwelt in caves and huts. There were thorns so old that the oaks, which had stood for centuries, were but as children beside these hoary fathers of the wild. Many of the golden-flowered gorse-bushes would have overtopped a tall horseman, while some of the ferns would have covered a large table. There were also broad docks whose leaves were the mammoths of vegetation. In hundreds of places it was impossible to enter the impenetrable thicket to see what lay within. When the fox had once entered these impassable barriers, the boldest huntsman abandoned the chase.

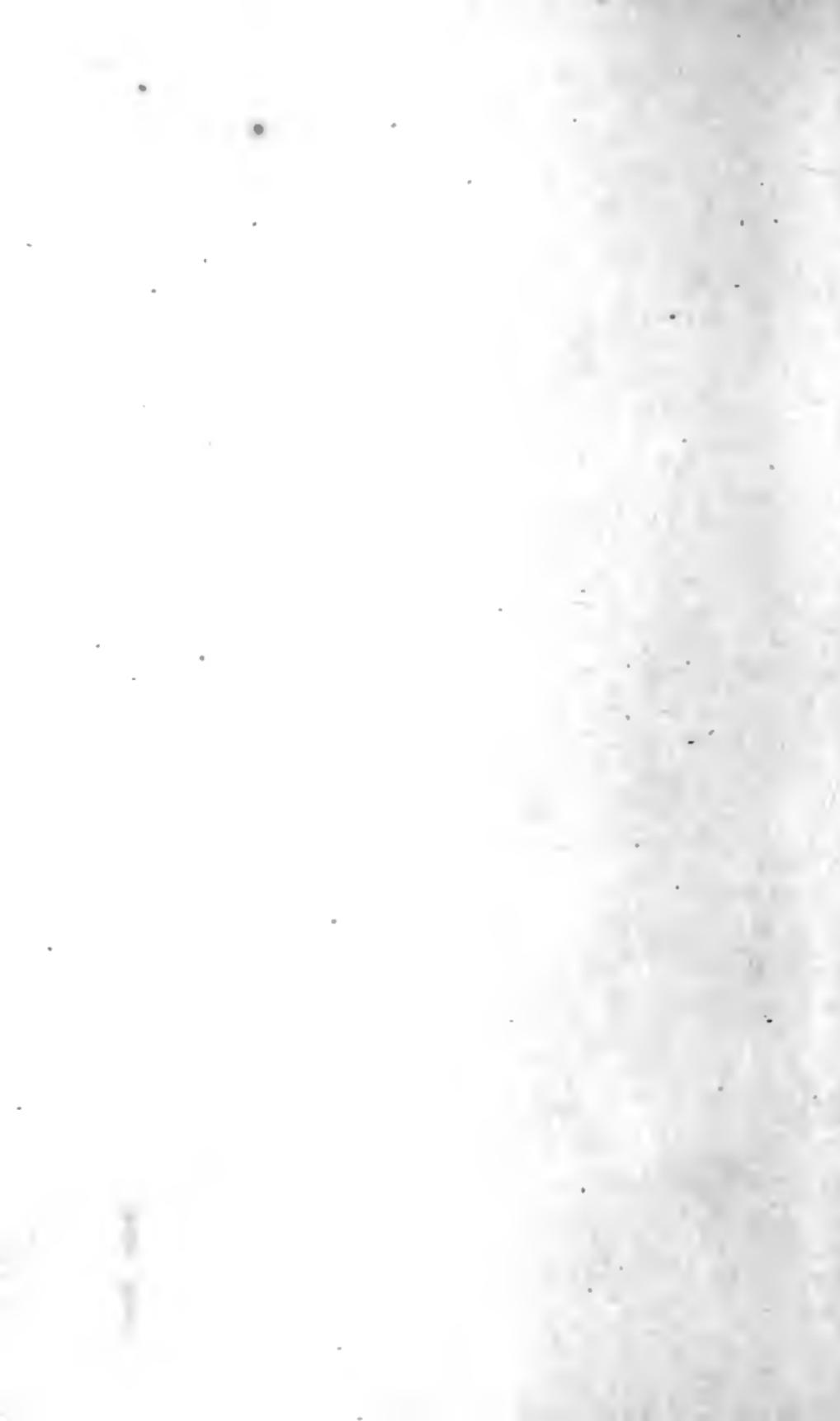
One of the most minute descriptions of actual scenery in the whole of Shakspere's immortal writings has reference to a well-known spot that lies within three miles of this Old-fashioned Town. He has preserved the very name of the little village, and which is still retained by the half-dozen old cottages that remain. How he obtained his information, and described the spot so minutely, unless by visiting it himself, is difficult to conceive, for the peculiarity of the scenery which he has delineated so truthfully is

not to my knowledge even alluded to in any work which has come under my own observation, that was printed so far back as the time of James the First. Rare Ben Jonson often came within a few miles of Our Old Town, and one of his masques was written for a nobleman who lived near this ancient neighbourhood; but nowhere have I seen it mentioned that Shakspere ever visited that part of the country which I have described in the present work. Finally, I may add, that with the exception of a few fictitious names, of both characters and places, my description of this Old-fashioned Town is as faithful a transcript of nature as it lies in my power to make. What is here portrayed I have either seen or heard of, and that few works have ever appeared so nakedly near to nature, as these almost entirely fanciless pictures of Our Old Town.



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